

Homer, Iliad, Book I

Sing, goddess, of the rage of Achilles, Peleus' son;
rage that brought innumerable troubles to the Achaeans,
sending many warriors down to Hades as dead shadows,
their bodies abandoned as prey for dogs and birds to feed on.

Such was the will of Zeus to be. Goddess, sing the beginning :
the quarrel that separated the son of Atreus, king of men,
and δῖος Achilles. Which of the gods made these two powers
stand in challenge?—Apollo, the one son of Leto and Zeus.

Now one day the priest they call Chryses came to the well-built ships
of the Achaeans. He hoped to free his daughter from the hand
of Agamemnon (which brought great dishonour to all concerned).
He brought with him a magnificent wealth of riches, and held
in hand a sign that showed his deference, for he had wrapped round
his golden staff the laurel crown he'd taken from his bowed head.
So down in his hands he held the leaves of the far-shooting god,
lowered to show his suppliance. He begged the Achaean men,
particularly the commanders of the people, the two
sons of Atreus :

"Sons of Atreus," he prayed, "and all you strong-armoured Achaeans,
may the Olympians allow you to flatten Priam's city,
and return home safe and well! Only release my beloved
daughter to me! Accept this ransom, in holy fear of the son
of God, far-shooting Apollo."

And all the Achaeans in thunderous unity shouted,
and assented with applause; for the army of warriors

reverenced the priest; and the glorious ransom appealed to them.
But Agamemnon remained unconvinced, and dismissed the priest
roughly, and delivered a dreadful word :

“Old man, let me not find you here by the ships ever again.
If you come, you’ll see how little power that leafy staff has.
The girl is mine. She shall live in my house in Argos and work
the loom, and warm my bed, until only old age sets her free.
Away out of my sight! I will not be provoked to anger.
I allow you to leave with your life.”

So what happened was, Apollo sent foul pestilence throughout
the army, and men began dying.

And this is how that came to be :

Sad at heart, old man Chryses, fearing Agamemnon’s power
and sway, departed from his audience without a word, and
now walked along the sands by the sea, hearing the constant crash
of the waves that moved eternal; and he prayed to Apollo
Rescuer, whom resplendently-spirited Leto had brought to be.

“Hear me!” he spoke out into the air, “Apollo of the bow
that shines with silver glints, which flash as far as Island Cryse
off to the west, and to Cilla, city away in the east.

In those places, and in island Tenedos between, you rule
strong; but now your hand, not only heart, is required to rule!
Hear me, Apollo σμίνθος ! You who destroy the mice that gnaw
at the bow-strings in the night, and the berries in the vineyard.
If ever I have crowned your temple with graceful accomplishment,
and sent you the scent of savoury thigh-pieces I burned for

your pleasure, bulls and goats and sheep, then hear this I pray to you :
 let each tear I drop be an arrow you fly, and bring them down,
 all those Danaans, to death.”

This, then, the old man prayed; and Φοῖβος Apollo obliged him.
 Coming down from the summits of Olympus, incensed at heart,
 his shoulders carrying his silver bow and quiver stuffed full
 of arrows, all which rattled, a deadly noise, as he came on,
 Apollo’s coming was like the night. Apart a great distance
 from the black ships, he let an arrow fly : and the bow-string’s voice
 sang a silvery sound. He hit the mules first, and the watchdogs,
 then sent death flying into the men, piercing them constantly.

And so after this many funeral fires burned for now.
 For nine mortal days the god showered them with death-tipped arrows;
 and on the tenth the army took action. For slim-armed Hera,
 frowning at all this needless death, nudged Achilles to call them
 to assembly. So when the army assembled, the wisest
 of them, then quick-footed Achilles spoke :

“Son of Atreus, king of men, should we not now sail out of here?
 It’s plain we’re being beaten back with progress. Sail away,
 that is, if any of us outruns the disease that drops us
 to dust as quickly as the war persists in doing! These threats
 urge our quick departure, all the Achaeans, back to our homes.

But come now! Let us ask a prophet, or whoever he be
 who sees truth in dreams (and in that way sees, distinctly, deep Zeus,
 for all dreams He brings to us), and let him tell us why Φοῖβος
 Apollo is so upset with us. Might he be disgusted
 with arrogance? Or might our many offerings of sacrifice

be wrong somehow, so that the rising steam and scent to Heaven
of lambs and goats makes him grimace? If you sacrifice rightly,
perhaps he'll receive our gifts gladly, and cure the pestilence."

So spoke Achilles, then he sat back down.

Calchas, son of Thestor, now stood before the assembly.
Of all seers he best read the meanings in expressive flights
of birds; he best knew the truth of all that "was", "is", and "will be".
His divinations had guided the Achaean ships to Troy,
and such faculty for prophesy was a gift from none other
than Φοῖβος Apollo himself.

Now Calchas addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

"Achilles, whom Zeus Orderer clearly favours, you wish me
to appraise the genius of him who hits all marks regardless
of distance, and want revealed a reason for his present rage.
But this task you encourage I fear will bring me much trouble.
So first hear these words : you must swear an oath that no harm will come
to me, and only then will I speak. For I am sure my words
will anger a man who stands here, one whom Achaeans obey.
He may hold his rage inside for now, but afterwards boil,
until finally he runs his hands onto me. Tell me, then,
if you will consider protecting my life, if I speak."

And brilliant Achilles answered him :

"Be strong," he said, "and speak of what you see within. Apollo,
beloved of Zeus, whose presence you reveal in your prayers
to the Danaans, has gifted you this power, and we must hear.

And not a one of us shall lay a heavy hand on you, no,
not a single Danaan in camp by the ships, not even
if a Danaan you name is Agamemnon (who believes
himself to be the best of us, and speaks this, so we hear him.)”

Emboldened by such fighting words, the blameless seer spoke out :

“It is the propriety of neither prayer nor sacrifice
that insults him : these we do well. It is the priest
Agamemnon shames, and in double accounting :
neither will he release his grip on her, nor will
he allow delivery of the ransom. This is the cause
for the pestilence of arrows, from he who aims
from far and does not miss. So, until we give back
the girl to the father—and neither a payment
for the girl nor the transaction of a ransom
is applicable now—the god will not push back
the disease from the army. The tender-eyed girl
must be led before a hecatomb to the city
of Chryse. Only then might we propitiate Apollo.”

Thus, having spoken, the prophet sat back down.

And Agamemnon rose to his feet, Atreus’ son,
ruler of the far and wide : and just now greatly
irritated. His whole spirit had gone full-dark
with breathing fury, and his eyes flashed fire.
The look he put into the prophet was frightful.

And he said :

“You miserable little puzzler of signs!
 Not a single encouraging prophesy has passed
 through your lips, only evil from out of your heart.
 Which of your prayers have brought us any healing?
 And now you speak before us all and say a vision
 tells you I am the reason for the pestilence?
 (Yet the far-shooter finds it unacceptable
 to point his aim at me, and strike me with disease?)
 And you say we must tolerate these woes because
 of a girl I choose to keep in my house?
 And paying or nor paying a ransom is part
 of all this pestilence?

I declare before you all now with assurance :
 Clytemnestra, my wedded wife, is peerless
 in beauty, in figure and poise, in elegance :
 and in thought, and hand-work—yet this girl’s no
 reduction, however this may be; as it is, I prefer her.

And yet it were better if I gave her back?
 I have no wish to bring harm to my men.

Well then!
 I will accept a gift a honour from the Argive army.
 For without the girl I’ll be the one man without
 the taste of any spoils of war. That would not be proper.
 All of you assembled here see that I must give up my prize.”

And brilliant Achilles answered :

“O most honoured king and commander, unequalled

in grasp, where are the great-hearted Achaeans
 to get you a prize? We men have no common store
 to pluck one out at will. What each man holds has been
 taken by his own hands, after obliterating cities.
 Going round gathering up each man's personal
 wealth, then doling it out all over again, in
 new proportion, would be inappropriate in every way
 thinkable.

Simply give the girl back to the god, and there's an end to it!
 We Achaeans will pay you back threefold and fourfold after
 Zeus allows us to bring down Troy's walls."

And King Agamemnon, commander of armies, gave answer :

"I know your ways, mighty Achilles. Be content
 as a very great warrior, and do not try to get
 around me in Mind. You can't outdo in all things.
 In this you will not overtake me. I will not be persuaded.

Perhaps a will to keep your prize compels this word
 of yours : you would have me return the girl, to keep your hands
 full : while I would sit here empty-handed.

Very well, then. If the great-hearted Achaean
 army offers me a gift, in worth equitable
 to my loss, as I shall judge . . . —But if I am not
 given this, I will come and take yours. Or the prize
 of Ajax, or of Odysseus. I will lift it
 up and take it away. And the gift I will leave
 for the man I come to will be the anger boiling in him.

Come! Let us return to this later. The shining
 sea awaits our ships, let us draw them down into
 the waves, with rowers enough, and a godly number
 of our best animals, beautiful in hide and hair and fleece.
 We shall set our precious Chryseis there, and send
 her away.

One of our best men must command this enterprise :
 Ajax, or Idomeneus, or δῖος Odysseus.

Or perhaps you, most extreme of men, Achilles?
 On our behalf, you shall be our emissary
 to propitiate the far-shooting god. And you
 will sacrifice all of the victims correctly, I am sure.”

Looking dark, Achilles said :

“ ὦ μοι ! Such hard-glinting shamelessness! And that ‘Mind’
 uncircuitable but with one thought in heart : profit.
 Why should the warriors obey your word at all?
 Whether by sea, or in the heat of battle?
 Why am I here, facing off spear to spear?
 I have no argument with the Trojans.
 They have never yet driven off my cattle,
 nor stolen my horses. And in my own city
 of Phthia, land of the richest soils
 stretched between long-shadowed mountains,
 they’ve yet to spoil our harvests.
 They have no mind to cross the sounding sea to do
 such things to me.

It's you! You shameless, ruthless, greedy man!
 We're here in this goddamn place for your sake alone!
 So Menelaus can win back his 'honour', and his wife, Miss
 Dog-face, from the Trojans. But for reasons unknown
 you disregard this sacrifice of ours, the whole Achaean
 army, here for lift you up in glory, and your brother and
 his wife. You forget all this. And now you'd take away
 from me my own hard-fought prize? which the Achaean
 sons allowed me to keep? We wreck all number of towns
 around Troy, plucking from the Trojans much property;
 but never yet have I received a prize like those
 you get when those places fall prey to us.
 And it's these hands that drive back the clamour
 where the fighting is worst. But come the division
 of spoil, and your prize is much greater, while I
 carry away 'a poor thing, but mine own',
 and much greater is the satisfaction I feel
 for the reward of my efforts, when I return
 exhausted to my ships, full of blood from the fight.

Now I'm off to Phthia. Far better to sail off
 with my forward ships than stay here and fight,
 to win riches to toss on to your heap,
 yet be disrespected for it."

And Agamemnon answered :

"Do it then. You won't hear me asking you to stay
 here for my sake. An army of men honour me,
 and Zeus above us, whom all regard as wisest.

And yet only for all the rest of us does Zeus
 love you, too. Of all the kings in our army
 the most hateful to me is you—for you enjoy
 quarrelling with friends as much as cutting Trojans
 dead! You're one of our strongest, yes, but know that Zeus
 has allowed this to be, and this *you* forget.

Go home. Take you ships and your men and rule
 over your Myrmidons at shadowy Phthia.
 I do not care for you, nor fear your rage;
 and in this way it shall be.

But hear what shall happen before you step onto
 your ships. I am coming to your tent and taking
 your very beautiful prize, Briseïs. Just as Φοῖβος
 Apollo takes my Chryseis—for it's decided
 this heavenly beauty is to be sent back home,
 among our crew and animals on a black ship.

Achilles, now you know which one of us is stronger.

And now no warrior here shall follow such ways
 as yours, for they will fear to speak such things 'for all
 to hear', such a word as 'I am as he', and claiming
 himself my equal, even directly to my face!"

So he spoke.

And the heart inside the broad, fiery-haired chest
 of Achilles pondered two acts : should he draw his sword
 from his side, push everyone back and stick its sharpened tip

into King Agamemnon's heart? Or should he stay calm? Was it possible for Achilles to restrain his rage?

So he thought it over in his heart and his mind,
then reached for the handle of his sharp sword.

And at this very time came Athena,
to Achilles alone : he alone saw her come
from Heaven. She seized him by his blonde hair
and turned him around; and he looked into her
fearfully-shining eyes, and went stock-still with awe.

His sword stayed sheathed at his side, and he spoke :

"Daughter of Raging Zeus! The strong, and warlike! Our protectress!
Again you appear—implying, I guess, more irritation?
Is the ὕβρις , the arrogance of Agamemnon, too much
to take? If so, hear this word : you shall now see me
take his life."

And the eyes of the goddess began to shine mildly :

"I've come down to stop you, if I can convince you,"
she said. "Hera, Woman Above, has sent me here.
She loves and honours you both in equal measure.
So please, cease your rage. End this challenge. Lift your hand
from the handle of your sword.

But pierce him with sharp word.
Speak out in your way of how things you say will be.

But first hear this I say to you now : for it, too,
will come to be : his arrogance will be the cause
that shall bring you three times as many glorious gifts.

So restrain yourself.

Obey me.”

And Achilles answered :

“Whoever hears gods would do best to obey them.”

And he pushed his great sword back in its sheath
by his thigh, but kept a heavy hand on its handle.
But he obeyed the word of goddess Athena.

And with one step she was back with the company
of the gods in the palace of Olympus.

But Achilles was still in a rage, persisting
in abrasive challenges to the king, saying :

“A wine-guzzler! with a dog face, and the heart
of a deer! Who sees you arming yourself,
and leaping into battle with the men?
Or taking up a post in an ambush,
out there with the best Achaeans?
You’d sooner die than fight.

No, you’d rather go among the tents from one side
to the other and take any man’s prize whose word
you don’t agree with! Your vocation is eating

people, and you lead weaklings begging to be fed
to you, commander of an army who can't win!

If not for them, you would never act outrageously again.

Now I say this to you : I shall give a solemn
oath, with this staff in my hands : this staff,
which lost the art of leaf- and branch-making
when it was severed from the stump it left behind
in the mountains. This shall never sprout afresh,
for the bronze of the sons of the Achaeans
have stripped it of leaves and bark, yet carry
the slender ash in their hands as symbol
of Right, by those who are called our Judges :
those who say they bear the laws from Orderer Zeus :
and draw them out for us : yet hold a fruitless staff.

Hear now my oath : these mighty words :
at some hour you will look for Achilles among
the sons of the Achaeans, and he will be gone.
You'll know then, in all the grief of loss,
how your own strength alone cannot defend
again man-killing Hector. You'll know, when you see
all the bodies of the fallen. Inside, your heart
will claw at you, in frustration that you
showed no proper respect to the bravest of the Achaeans!"

Thus spoke Achilles. And he threw down by his feet
his staff studded with gold nails—ornamentation
conveying grace and power—and the nail-heads
in the dirt flashed fire in all men's' eyes.

And the assembly watched him sit back down.
 Then over their heads Agamemnon redoubled
 his anger at Achilles : but then rose Nestor
 to his feet, which silenced the king. Nestor,
 whom all called the 'sweet-speaking' Achaean,
 the orator from holy Pylos. His tones flowed
 from his tongue as easy as honey flows,
 yet in voice of sharp clarity, his intonation
 like a blade, as glints dazzle warriors' eyes,
 so word matched word for sway. Such honeyed speech
 endeared him to the men, who heard, and listened.

In his time two generations had come, and gone;
 men born with him, raised in holy Pylos, and now
 faded into the past. And now he stands as king.
 In age, men thought him a full one hundred in years.

Now Nestor addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

“ὦ πόποι ! The Achaeans swim lost in deep sorrow!
 Surely Priam would laugh with his sons in sweet joy
 to hear of his enemies quarrelling themselves
 into frailty, so surrendering their hope
 of finding shore—you, the best among us
 in strategy and war! Hear me now : my older
 years give me farther sight.

Long ago I kept
 company with men far more powerful
 than all of you; and they heard and listened to me.

Such men I have yet to see again. Perhaps I
never shall. Peirithous, and Dryas, teacher of men;
and Caeneus, and Exadius, and dominant Polyphemos;
and some know I knew Theseus, Aegeus' son,
a man skilled in many arts, as an immortal
would be, and, being as god, is not to be seen
now by men in our day. (But must it be so?)

These, the mightiest men ever raised on the earth!
Their strength challenged the Centaurs, who had sprung
out their mountain holes—and obliterated them.
I speak of all that we know well, yet fail to see imitated.

I moved with these men when I went from holy Pylos,
a land from far. But from even farther came a summoning
for me : for they would have me go with them.
Among them I fought my own way when it fell.

Such men I have yet to see again. Perhaps I
never shall; and they heard and listened to me.
So best for you is to hear me and obey.

Most excellent king, your power must restrain you
from leading away the girl from Achilles' tent.
Allow her to stand as the gift given by the sons
of the Achaeans, as a prize for his bravery.

And you, son of Peleus! Stop choosing
to quarrel and compete with our great king,
and face off strength to strength, when strength united
is required to win this war; and it is very different

to face a man to whom fate has given
 prerogative to hold the sceptre, no common
 honour, and allowed to be as it is by Zeus.
 Your goddess mother gave birth to a powerful son,
 but Agamemnon, as king over men, has yet
 more power than you.

O worthy king Agamemnon, restrain your rage.
 It is I, Nestor, who asks this.
 Reject all further anger against Achilles,
 who amid evil battle is a powerful inspiration
 to all our warriors.”

In answer spoke King Agamemnon :

“Yes, old man, you’ve spoken rightly.
 But this man would be above all others.
 He would be superior and give orders to all.
 This is not a man to obey you, I am sure.”

And δῖος Achilles interrupted him :

“I would be called a good-for-nothing coward,
 if I nod on every point to your very last word.
 Order others around, but not me. I hear you
 no longer. But hear this I say : and it will be so :
 it would be wrong for me to fight for the girl,
 with you or with anyone, since I was given her,
 and thus will I let her be taken away.

But everything mine by my swift black ships

will stay mine. You will take nothing from me
of what is mine. Nothing will be yours against
my will. Indeed, come try it, so the assembly
will know : you will get a spear plunged into you,
and your dark blood will run out round its shaft of ash-wood.”

And Agamemnon, king of men, stayed silent,
content to return to this idle challenge later.

Everyone rose, and the assembly dissolved,
and each went to his separate business and duties,
leaving behind the many beached black ships.

Achilles walked back to his tent with Patroclus
at his side, back to his army of Myrmidons
by their own well-built, well-balanced, long-travelled ships.

But Agamemnon stayed by the restless salt waves
of the sea. He drew a ship down into the water,
then appointed twenty oarsmen to occupy
its wide rows of benches. A hecatomb
was led on board; then King Agamemnon himself
led the fresh-faced Chryseis aboard the ship,
and sat her down. And he chose as captain
of this voyage πολύμητις Odysseus.

So these set sail over the salt water.

Back at the camp Agamemnon gave a general order
for purification. So the men went naked
into the sea, and the dirt they scraped from their skin

defiled the water around their bodies;
 and the sea carried their pollution away.
 Now pure in body and garment, the army
 gave the gods countless beasts, their best available
 of bull and goat, sacrificing them on the sands
 by the ununderstandable sea. And the steam
 of savoury fat rose up with the smoke, and pleased
 Heaven—so the men below hoped.

So the army encampment toiled through the day.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon's most urgent matter
 was to continue his quarrel with Achilles.
 So he summoned his minister Talthibius;
 also Eurybates : two discreet and trusted
 attendants of his.

"Go to the tent of Achilles", he said.
 "Take the hand of the very beautiful
 Briseïs, and bring her here. If he refuses
 to give her, I will return with a company
 of men, and take her myself. That will go harder
 for him."

Thus spoke Agamemnon. Then he sent them
 on their disagreeable business which they were
 constrained to make happen.

So the two men walked reluctantly by the sea-
 spray, and looked out on the ununderstandable
 beyond. Then, sighing, they came to the tents and ships

of the Myrmidons, and he was sitting
by his tent beside his elaborate black ship :
and Achilles was not happy to see them.

The two men, wide-eyed with terror, and deeply ashamed,
stood before the king, and did not say one word.

But Achilles understood, and spoke out to them :

“χαίρε ! boys, who spread the news of Zeus and men;
come closer! I have no argument with you.
I know that it’s Agamemnon who’s sent you
here to lift the girl lightly out of my fingers.
Briseïs. Ah, come! Patroclus, truly Zeus-born,
lead the girl gently into the light hands
of these men, and they will take her away.

But you two men shall be my witnesses
in this I say, which yet has been only threat,
but now I make it a promise. Before mortal men,
before the gods (and we’re told they’re happy)
above us, and before him, our proclaimed king;—
when later you collapse toward shameful ruin,
I will be off in some other direction,
and looking some other way, when the army
has need of me. So these rages of his
are dangerous, and his lack of foresight
destructive. He lacks sense to see past and future
together at once; and so his present
is a mess, and his men now heavily threatened
when they fight the enemy beside their ships.”

So he spoke. Patroclus obeyed Achilles at once.
 Old childhood friends, each was the dearest intimate
 of the other; and never would there be another
 for each. When Patroclus brought Briseïs
 from the tent, Achilles, as always, was struck
 with constant surprise at her heavenly beauty.
 Patroclus handed her to them to take away.
 Then the two withdrew into the shadows
 of their ships on the sand, and listened while
 the woman went away only unwillingly.

Achilles looked out at the sea, the grey sea,
 the ancient grey sea still churning its waves
 unto whenever it is to be : and he sighed :
 and tears dropped from his eyes. He sat on the sand,
 and prayed to his mighty mother, reaching out his hands :

“Mother, why bring me into a brief life, yet Zeus
 High-Thunderer won’t allow me even brief glory?
 Why live for nothing much?

No, it is not High Zeus
 who brings my trouble. It is King Agamemnon
 who disrespects me! He takes my prize for himself!
 From my fist he plucks with ease what men
 strenuously should have wrested from my fingers!”

So he sighed, and the tears fell. His mighty mother
 heard, as she lay seated on the deep water
 with her father, old man Nereus. She surfaced

out of the sea as a grey mist drifting. She moved
along the waves with ancient ease, and came round him.

And he felt her touch around him, and heard her call
his name :

“Child, why tears? Why such hurt in your heart?
Speak out so we both know.”

With a heavy sigh the quick-footed Achilles answered her :

“You know. Why explain to a goddess who knows all
already? We obliterated the holy city of Thebe,
King Eëtion’s seat, and brought back the wealth.
The army made equitable division of the spoils;
except that they handed Atreus’ son a wondrous
fair-faced daughter of a priest—of all people!
Her name is Chryseis; and Chryses her father
(who, no small point, is a priest of far-achieving
Apollo) came to the bronze-armoured army
to free his daughter, and brought an extravagant,
shining ransom, and in his hands he held the wreaths
meant for his head, those for far-shooter Apollo,
on a staff of gold, and he begged the Achaean army,
and most of all the two leaders of the others;
and afterwards all the army clapped and shouted
in agreement with the priest, showing decency,
and pleased to receive the splendidly shining ransom.

But unhappy Atreus’ son sent him away,
unrelenting, and with violence. So the old man

went away agitated and prayed to Apollo,
 and the god heard his word, and showered us
 with arrows : now, soldiers died needlessly,
 one after another, too many to count,
 from end to end the camp was showered with arrows.

A clear-eyed prophet then spoke to us in assembly,
 and told us the reason for the bowman's anger.

I, then, spoke first, pleading for us to apologize
 to the god. But the fury of the son of Atreus
 redoubled, and the threatening word he spoke
 has come to be, just as he had said it would be :

The compliant Achaeans are now sailing
 the girl home to Cryse, bringing with her many gifts
 for the gods. Meanwhile, from my tent ministers
 led away the prize the proud army gave me,
 Briseus' daughter.

Mother, help your son! Protect my purpose,
 just as you enclose me now in your arms.
 If ever you had the power to hold the ear
 of the gods, please rise to Olympus now,
 and meet Zeus in prayer, for many times
 you have encouraged his enterprises,
 and cheered his heart in both word and effort.
 Many happy times I've heard you remembering,
 when I was a child in my father's halls—
 remembering that 'I alone of all immortal
 gods and goddess saved Zeus from ruin,

when the others aimed to bind him hand and foot,
 a shameful plan crafted by Poseidon and Athena,
 and his wife, too.' But you came and set him free.
 Goddess, you summoned a Hundred-Handed One,
 the one the gods address as Briareus,
 pitiless as salt water waves and sea-storms.

When Briareus came to Olympus and sat
 by the side of Zeus, who relished his brilliance
 of power, the others feared to pursue
 their palace revolt, so no hand nor foot was bound
 that day. 'And Zeus triumphed,' you used to say
 to me, who loved to hear you say it, and loved you
 for it. Bring this to mind now, and please go
 to the side of our mighty father and embrace
 his knees, and ask him to aid the Trojans.

And as for the others! Let them all be gathered
 and imprisoned in the sterns of their idle ships,
 and the Trojan warriors will come and kill them
 without effort; so that they may hail *their* king
 with acclaim and love; and that son of Atreus
 Agamemnon comes to know his blindness
 in insulting the bravest man of his army."

Then through her sea-salt tears his goddess mother Thetis spoke :

"ὦ μοι ! Child, why did I bring you into this
 world, if you must suffer as if accursed!
 It were better to never taste mortality.
 Sitting safe and sound in peace by your ships,
 without sorrow, is not to be your fate.

Destiny will not have you live a long life.
 You were doomed at birth to an early death—
 awful to say, and to know it! For we sorrow
 at what you might have been, were not this war
 to be your end.

Terrible was the day
 I birthed you in our halls.

Yet I will go to Zeus High-Thunderer,
 I will rise snowy Olympus, and I will try
 to win him to my word; and in this way answer
 your plea for help : I will tell him your tale in full.

Meanwhile, you stay by your fast-sailing ships.
 Nurse your rage against the army; and keep out
 of the fight. Hear from afar the men calling out
 for your help, before they're butchered open,
 and their insides surface.

But you must wait twelve days. Yesterday, Zeus
 went with Oceanus to the excellent
 Ethiopians, who stand at the limit
 of the world. It is the matter of a banquet,
 nothing more; and the other gods are with them, too.
 But when he returns, I'll kneel on the bronze floor
 of his palace and embrace his knees, and win him
 over to our side, I think."

Thetis, then, goddess of all the sea-nymphs haunting the waters,
 withdrew away over the waves; and left him there, her one son.

He sat on the sands, his rage inciting his limbs
 like fire inside. They had taken the woman
 from him by force, against his will!
 The beautiful, shapely, well-dressed woman.

Meanwhile, Odysseus sailed the black ship
 into the harbour of Chryse, bearing
 the noisy holy hecatomb in the hold.
 He took in the sail and folded it away,
 then removed the two forestays and lowered
 the mast onto its rest; and had the ship rowed in,
 its forty oars waving slowly past the other
 ships secured at the mooring-place by the shore.

Out from the ship they cast the anchor-stones,
 and secured the stern-cables.

Out from the ship they came, pushing through the rushing
 sea-surf; and they were glad to set their feet on shore.

Out from the ship they led the hecatomb
 of beasts, brought to honour long-working Apollo.

And out from the ship came the daughter of Chryses.
 Odysseus escorted the girl to the altar,
 and put her in the arms of her much-loved father.
 And he said :

“Chryses, king of men Agamemnon has entrusted
 me to give you your daughter, with the Danaans’
 best regards. And to sacrifice here to Φοῖβος

a holy hecatomb;—both to propitiate
the far-shooting god, for now he keeps sending us
something terrible.”

So he spoke, and put the girl in her father’s arms,
who received his precious daughter with joy.

Quickly, then, Odysseus brought the animals
to the altar. Each one came to stand there,
unaware it was about to have its throat cut.
Then the men washed; then they took the barley
grain into their hands :

then Chryses raised his arms and prayed aloud :

“Hear me!” he said. “Apollo of the silver bow!
Who protects Chryse, and holy Cilla,
and is mighty master of Tenedos!
As once I prayed, and once you heard,
so hear once more as I pray to you now,
and bring this wish to be : lift the sickness!
Remove from the Danaans their disgrace and death.”

So he spoke, and Φοῖβος Apollo heard his prayer.

And when their prayers were done, and they had sprinkled
the barley grains onto the victim, they bent back its head,
its eyes raised to Heaven, and cut its throat, and bled
it to death. Then, they peeled its skin off. They cut out
the thigh-pieces, and placed those precious parts
on a strip of fat, which they folded over the thigh-pieces,

to cover them; and then over all that were placed
the raw pieces. All these precious parts were for
the god to delight in : a savour of honour.

And the old priest Chryses burned everything
on branches of wood; and poured the fiery wine :
and the young men upright by him, five in number,
each held a five-tined fork over the fire,
and stood silent. Then when the thigh-pieces were burned,
and the inward parts were tasted of, they cut up
the rest, and spitted all these pieces, and roasted
them all skilfully; then drew it all from the iron,
and piled the roasted meats on platters.

So their efforts were done, they had prepared
their meal. So they relaxed; and feasted with equal
share for all; and the hearts of all were pleased.

Then when they sat satisfied with food and drink,
the youths filled mixing-bowls to the brim with wine.

First they let a few drops fall into each cup,
then served these out to all, for each man to pour
to the god.

So all the rest of the day they soothed the god.

They sang the beautiful Παιάν , the choral song
of thanksgiving and healing. The Achaean sons
rejoiced while celebrating long-working
Apollo, who aims from far and hits his mark.

And Apollo from far heard their song, and was cheered.

Then when the sun went down, and darkness came,
they lay down to rest by the stern-cables of the ship.

And as early-born Dawn spread her rosy fingers

in greeting they rowed out and put to sea,
and headed back to the Achaean army.
The tall mast was socketed, and sail raised;
and Apollo Healer filled the white sail
with a favourable forward wind. The sea hissed
round the keel slitting its undulating body
as the ship went its way with the wind.

When they returned to the extensive camp
of the Achaean army, they drew the black ship
onto shore, and set her high upon the sands
on props, upright among the ordered row
of black ships balanced along the shoreline
by the restless sea. And the men scattered
to their separate tents and own company
of ships.

But quick-footed Achilles sat by his fast ships,
in boiling rage. He had no care to go among
the men who seek glory with words in assembly;
nor did he go to the fight. He simmered at heart
as he sat in his spot, yearning for shrieking
the war-cry, and leaping into the fight.

And in this boiling rage did twelve days pass.

Then into Olympus, far boundary
encompassing infinity, the gods
returned as one splendid society,
with Zeus the head.

And then Thetis surfaced through the waves of the sea.

When Dawn spread around high-peaked Olympus,
Thetis went up to meet Zeus Endless Thunderer.
She found him sitting apart from the others,
on the highest tip of many-peaked Olympus.

She sat by him and embraced his knees with her left
hand, while her right hand sought to take his chin
from under, in token of supplication.

And she prayed to Zeus, son of Cronos, highest king :

“Zeus! Father! Surely you remember the help
I once gave you when the immortals had ideas
of their own? If so, please make this happen for me :
Bring honour to my son, my son who is fated
to a early death, yet king of men Agamemnon
disrespects him, he’s taken the prize my son
won with his own hands, and which the army
allowed to be. So you honour him, Zeus Orderer!

Invest the Trojan warriors with strength
as yet unmatched by Argive blade, spear, or hand—
until the army honours my son in the way he deserves!”

Thus spoke Thetis. And cloud-gathering Zeus
remained for a long while in silence.
Yet as Thetis clung to his knees, so she
clung to all of him, and she begged a second time :

“Show you promise with a nod of your head.
Or else deny this one desire of mine
and reveal how much you dishonour me!”

Then answered the greatly vexed, cloud-dispersing Zeus :

“This is sickly business you’re setting me.
You will go from here, and I will be left
with Hera, who will trouble my spirit
with her stinging words. She’s only just said
in front of everyone that I assist
the Trojans in combat!

Leave here now, go
back to the sea, before she sees us together,
and conceives an unhelpful thought. I promise you
all shall come out as you wish, all for your pleasure.

I see you choose not to believe me. So come now!
I will nod my head, so you shall know that what I say is true.
The word I give among the Immortals cannot be broken,
nor stay unfinished, if I give my nod.”

Thetis watched Orderer Zeus bow his dark brows,
and the loose, flowing, ambrosial hair of the king
of the immortals rippled; and infinite Olympus quaked.

Once the two had resolved together in this way,
they separated. Right away she plunged into
the deep salt sea, away from glimmering Olympus.
And Orderer Zeus withdrew into his palace.

At the coming of their father and king,
 the gods stood up from their sitting-place together.
 No one dared stay indifferent, but all rose up
 readily before his shining presence.

He sat down on his throne. And Hera was unable
 to stop seeing Thetis in her mind, dressed only
 in sea-froth, daughter of the old man of the sea,
 sitting in close counsel with her husband apart
 from the rest. Right away she spoke stinging words
 to her husband :

“My ever tricky-minded one! Whom of the gods
 have you shared your wide and long counsel with
 in secret this time? You keep far too many
 of such preoccupations to yourself,
 and weigh them in dark places in these secret ways!
 Why not kindly tell me what is on your mind this time?”

And then came answer from the father of gods and men :

“Hera, please will you stop this hope you have
 of ever understanding all of my words!
 They are increasingly difficult to absorb.
 Though you are my wife, and understand some
 of what others won't, you must not question me
 on what I'd much rather keep to myself,
 apart from the gods. What is suitable for you
 to hear, this you shall know before all others.
 But of my secret matters, search not after each
 last detail! Question me no further!”

And Zeus stared into his wife's wide brown eyes.

But Hera spoke out :

"The king says such horrid words to me!" she said for all to hear.

"When in earlier times have I asked you
any questions? Have I ever before searched after
'each last detail'? You're free to think of whatever
you will! But I have fear in heart that she might win
you over, and for what reason, salty-footed
Thetis, a daughter of the old man of the sea
of all people! She sat beside you at dawn
and embraced your knees. And then you nodded
something sure and certain about Achilles,
I think it was, how you shall honour him,
and allow many to die by the ships
of the Achaeans. This is what I think I heard."

Then spoke cloud-gathering Zeus :

"Marvellous lady! You are always suspecting!
Up to now I have put up with all of this.
Say what you will, it will achieve nothing,
except you'll be pushed further from my heart!
—then things will turn more miserable for you.
Even if every word you say is 'sure
and certain', even so it is how I want it to be!

So sit beside me silently, at least softly,
and obey my command. For if I raise
my hands then all the powers of Heaven

together will not stop me coming at you.
Nothing will protect you if I reach out
my invincible hand. All the other
powers will not be able to help you.”

Thus the Orderer Zeus spoke, and his wife
the wide-eyed Queen Hera sat beside him
in silence. Fearing her husband, she said
not one word more. She stifled her anger.

The other gods of Olympus in the palace
of Zeus were troubled, and first to speak was master-
artist Hephaestus, and Hera his mother
was grateful for his courage.

He said :

“This contest of yours derides all balance.
Hear yourselves! Quarrelling over human beings!
Like a creeping infection you two will set
all of Olympus to roaring and brawling!
What delight will this feast offer any of us,
if worse wrangling awaits to upset the table?
Would you make heaven itself unbearable?
An excellent feast is prepared for us,
and we should delight in it.

Gently I urge my mother, who herself is full
of sense, to be pleasant with loving father Zeus;
so no further scolding disrupts our feast,
and throws all the gods into confusion.

Zeus Lightning-Producer could scatter us
 from here instantly, if he chose to do so.
 Combine all our strength and Zeus still far excels us!
 So caress him with mild words;
 and the Olympian will be kind with us.”

This he said; then rose from the table, and set
 affectionately in his mother’s hand
 the golden two-handled cup of nectar.

And he said :

“Patience, mother. Tolerate your troubles,
 and hold your head high. My eyes, which give you
 the intensity of my love, would not like to see
 you get struck. All my tremendous sorrow
 wouldn’t give me power enough to defend you.
 For the consequences are immeasurable
 if one faces off against the Olympian.

Once before, when I was defending you,
 Zeus took me by the foot and threw me out
 of glorious heaven. All day long till
 the sun went down I fell, till nightfall,
 when I hit the small target of island
 Lemnos in the sea, with little life left in me.
 There the Sintian people quickly came to help,
 and took good care of me after my fall.”

So he spoke, and slim-armed Hera, Woman Above,
 smiled. And she took from her son the shining cup,

smiling still.

Then the gods turned to the pleasurable nectar.
 Hephaestus drew one by one from the mixing-bowl
 and served it round the table, from left to right.
 And as its happy properties of hallucinogenia
 kicked in, an uproarious laughing erupted
 among the happy gods in the palace.
 For some reason they found their Hephaestus,
 panting and puffing in concentration
 as he drew for each drinker from the bowl,
 amusing, for some reason, up there in heaven.

All day long, as the sun sank toward the stream,
 they had their feast; and each enjoyed equal share
 of the goodness; and all hearts finally felt peace,
 outwardly at least, while Apollo held his lovely lyre,
 and the Muses sang in alternation with sweetest voice :
 one sister would call out, and another would answer her.

When the shining light had gone below for the night,
 each went to one's own place of rest—though all places
 here were the beautiful hand-work of Hephaestus,
 crooked-footed artist, the god who limps
 while he walks around, creating with his skilful mind.

Olympian Zeus Lightning-Producer
 lay down to rest, and sweet sleep came.
 Beside him in bed lay golden-throned Hera.

End of Book I

Book II

All those who drive the chariots into battle,
 all the soldiers of the Achaeans by the sea,
 slept in peace under the restless stars : and the gods,
 settled over everything that is or will ever be,
 likewise lay in silence : all night long : but Zeus
 was awake, thinking how to honour Achilles,
 and kill many Achaeans by their anchored ships.

So he arrived at what he thought was his best plan :
 he would send Agamemnon a terrible nightmare.

So he spoke into the dark, and a changing thing came :

“Evil dream,” the king spoke, “go now down to the sleeping
 ships of the Achaean army, to the tent of commander
 of men Agamemnon, son of Atreus. (Atreus,
 who fed children into his brother’s avid mouth,
 his brother’s own sons, if you can stomach the truth!)

As I say to you, so you will do. Command him
 to arm for battle immediately all of his long-haired
 Achaeans; for just now the chance is theirs to take
 the high-rising city, once and for all.

He will think : ‘The immortals have joined forces on Olympus.
 Hera’s prayers have bent all those who heard her to her purpose :
 now death comes finally to the Trojans!’”

Thus spoke Zeus, king of light and dark.

And the dream heard, and went swiftly to the ships,
 those supported on props beside the seashore's froth.
 Within the Achaean army tents the dream came
 to Agamemnon, and poured through him ambrosial
 vision.

And into his ear came the voice of Neleus' son,
 Nestor, the elder most prized by Agamemnon :
 and it spoke :

"You sleep? Atreus' son, horse-tamer wise in war?
 Do not long for the night, when people are cut off
 in their place. Too much sleep imperils the man thinking
 for the whole army, which has entrusted itself,
 and its enormous responsibilities, to you.

Hear me : I hold heavy words from Zeus himself to hand to you.
 Though far from here, he feels your distress, and pities you.

Command the Achaeans to arm for battle.
 Right now you will shatter high-rising Troy!
 The immortals have joined forces on Olympus.
 Hera's prayers have bent all those who heard her to her purpose :
 now death comes finally to the Trojans, through the will of Zeus!

But I warn you : keep this in mind when honeyed sleep
 relaxes its grip, and sends you up."

So the Dream receded from his ear and left him
 as he lay, where he pondered in heart on things
 hopeful to him, but never to be. For inside him
 he believed he would take Priam's city that day!

Fool!

How can a mind of man, despite reach and polish,
 contrive as Zeus does? who had already destined
 to place much pain in the hearts of the Achaean
 and the Trojan alike, putting many groans
 in their throats as they faced off in brutal combat.

And so Agamemnon awoke from sleep;
 yet the dream still clung to him; and whether
 hope or prophecy, the king believed it.

He sat up straight. First, he covered himself
 with soft tunic, a beautiful shining linen;
 then stepped into his gorgeous robe of royalty.

He bound a lovely pair of sandals to his feet.
 Around his shoulders he hung his silver-studded
 sword; and then he took into his hand the sceptre
 of his fathers : invincible always.

Thus he went among the ships of the bronze-armoured Achaeans.

Now up in high Olympus the light of Dawn began to shine,
 and Zeus and all of the immortals felt her welcoming touch.

Down below, Agamemnon ordered his ministers
to summon the army to assembly.

They gave clear-voiced summons, and the army
of Achaean warriors heard, and started for the meeting
place, a great movement of men.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon met with the elders
in the privacy of his tent, where he supposed
himself devising a shrewd and sagacious plan :

“Hear me, friends, for a god came to me in my sleep.
This very night, an ambrosial voice resembling
δῖος Nestor spoke into my ear and said to me :

‘Hear me : for I hold words from Zeus himself.
Though far from here, he feels your distress.
Command the Achaeans to arm for battle.
Right now you will shatter high-rising Troy!’

And then it was gone, flown away. Then sweet sleep
released me and let me up. So come now!
We must arm the Achaeans for battle!

But we must act wisely in this with the men.
Let us first test the favour of this idea.
I will speak to them of the threat of battle,
and urge them to fill their ships with rowers
and flee Troy and its warriors. But you
on all sides speak out in opposition

to this, and prevent the army's retreat."

So spoke Agamemnon, with powerful confidence.

Now, rising from his seat, the elder most precious
to the king, and himself a king, of sandy Pylos,
came Nestor : who addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

"O friends, our Achaean leaders and counsellors,
if any other of us had told us this dream,
we might reject it as a devious trick,
a false thing : but we see the best of us
telling us this. So come! Let us arm for battle!"

So he spoke, and the elders left the tent;
and all kept their trust in their commander,
all the many sceptred kings : and they came
to the meeting place where the assembly
of warriors stood together, aroused and agitated.
Even as masses of bees, up from out of a rock,
gust into the air growing with fresh swarms,
and cluster over the flowers of spring,
flitting here and there over all : just so the ranks
of men from tent and ship advanced in rows
to the gathering place on the wide shore
by the sea. And with them Rumour like a wildfire sparked
courage and encouragement, a message from Zeus,
urging on the effort : and thus they all came to assembly.
Under the disturbance of over a hundred thousand men
the earth rumbled, as each sat in spot; and a clamour arose
of voices : and the nine ministers shouted for calm and to hear

the king, beloved of Zeus. Finally, with earnest effort,
the ministers settled everyone down, and quieted
all the back-and-forth yelling : and Agamemnon
king of men arose, sceptre in hand, and all saw.

This sceptre was the hand-work of Hephaestus,
who had applied much concentration to this art.
Hephaestus gave it to Zeus, who gave it to Hermes;
and Hermes Δολιος passed it to horse-driver
Pelops. And Pelops bestowed it on wise Atreus;
and at his death Atreus left it for Thyestes
to pick up, a man rich in flocks : then handed down
for Agamemnon to hold, who now rules over
Argos, and many dominions of the mainland
around it, and many islands.

Holding this sceptre up high, he spoke to the men :

“O friends, heroes, Δαναοί , the hands of the god
of war and slaughter, Ἄρης himself, Destructor :
hear me!

Zeus War-bringer has led me into blind folly!
He, the god himself, promised me, with a nod of
his head, that we would hold out here until
Troy’s high walls were pulled down and the city
obliterated;—and then we would go our way
home. But now he gives me evil and deceitful
guidance—he commands me to return to Argos!
An inglorious sight after the loss of so many men!
This, then, is as the supreme god would have it,

who brings to dust whole cities, and lowers the head
of one man; for his power is greatest.

A odious tale this shall be, heard of by those
yet to be on the earth, of how the Achaeans
fought with only so many, yet so well;
yet all their mastery of fighting brought nothing.

We fight an army smaller than ours, yet
are unable to win decisively.

And we see no end in sight.

And if we so chose to do,
Achaean and Trojan,
to make solemn promise
with sacrifice, then reckon up the number
of our armies, including all the Trojan
homes in the city; and we Achaeans
were thoroughly ordered and reckoned up
in companies of ten; and each company
would use a Trojan man to pour its wine
for drinking;—then many of our companies
of ten would go without a wine-pourer!
Just so great I say we outnumber the Trojans
who live inside the city! But Troy has many
allies, many spearmen, that distract us
from finally flattening the comfortable
citadel of Ilium to dust. Nine years now
—wasted here! Each year a blessing from Zeus,
now gone. Our ships' timber is rotting away;
and all their cables undoing themselves.
And what about our wives? And our little ones,
who live now as children and sit idly

in our halls, waiting to receive us most
 favourably. As it is, the work we came here
 to do continues unsuccessful. So come then!
 As I say, so shall you hear : we are going home!
 Let us take flight on our ships and get out of here!
 For we will never take high-rising Troy!”

Thus spoke Agamemnon, rousing the hearts
 of all the warriors inspired by his speech,
 and all the other half who hadn’t heard a word
 of it. So the multitude of the assembled
 army rushed on like the long waves of the Icarian Sea
 when the East Wind or South Wind rouses it to fury,
 diving down from the clouds of Zeus Descender.
 Or when the West Wind, rushing into a cornfield,
 swoops along the standing grain, and all nod their head
 to the breeze : just so were all the men now in motion,
 and with much outcry and shouting were rushing
 to their ships, and the dust their feet raised filled the air
 with cloud. They encouraged one another to take hold
 of the ships and drag them into the sparkling δῖος sea.
 So they cleared out the trenches, that would slip
 the ships down into the waves : while their cries and shouts
 reached Heaven, so happy were they to be heading
 homeward!

So they started to remove the props and supports
 from under the standing ships.

Then the Argives may have returned home against fate,
 somehow : but Hera spoke to goddess Athena :

“ὦ πόποι ! child of Zeus Contriver,

my ever-evolving trickster Athena!

Is it possible for these men to take flight

over the shapely sea, and get home to wherever?

Would they leave behind, for Priam and Troy’s delight,

their precious Helen, for whom they’ve killed so many

all these years? All those bodies lost to their homeland?

Go now to that ‘bronze-armoured’ ‘long-haired’ Achaean

army, and restrain each man with sensible words.

Stop them dragging their sharp-prowed ships into the water.”

So spoke Hera, and shining-eyed goddess Athena

obeyed. Down from the peaks of Olympus

with one step she came to the so-called ‘swift’

ships of the Achaeans. There, she saw Odysseus

standing at his black ship, but putting no hand to it.

He looked distressed in heart and soul at the tumult

around him. So the shining-eyed goddess Athena

came close to Odysseus, and whispered in his ear :

“Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded one!

So you’re off to row away like crazed birds in flight

from Priam and Troy? and leave them to enjoy

precious Helen? For whose sake far too many men

have lost their lives!

Yet you would go home? No! You must stop this!

Go through the army of the Achaeans

and restrain each man using sensible words

from dragging their curved ships into the sea.”

So spoke Athena, whose voice he recognized,
 and as she spoke he broke into a run
 and flung away his cloak along the way.
 Eurybates, an Ithacan friend and servant
 to Odysseus, took up the cloak and folded it away,
 while Odysseus ran up to Agamemnon.

Sceptre was handed between them, as sign of accord.
 Odysseus now spoke for the army, holding
 the staff of the fathers : invincible always.

Thus he rushed away along the beached ships of the Achaeans.

And as he ran through the confused army
 he looked for kings, and pre-eminent counsellors;
 and to each he spoke out in an attempt to restore order :

“Good man! This panic is monstrous!—It’s nauseating!
 Stand to order! And get everyone around you
 to stand to order! You act as if you have clear
 understanding of the mind of Agamemnon—
 but you don’t! *All that he said was an attempt
 to test us!* So I don’t think he’s receiving this
 right now with any joy. Virtually none of us
 heard what was said in his tent before assembly,
 and now this!—More evil work to enrage
 Agamemnon, commander of men, against the men!

But what do they say? Great-hearted kings are beloved of Zeus;
 for all that is, is as he allows it to be,

Zeus Counsellor, Contriver, Orderer.”

And to each warrior he found in confusion
he struck him brutally with the sceptre;
and he called out his command sharp and clear :

“You! Stand there! Shut your mouth! Listen to your orders
from your superiors! You’re lazy and weak!
You contribute nothing encouraging here!
If you want to be as kings, then follow a good king!
There must be one king and one commander,
whom Zeus allows to raise the sceptre over us,
both in judgment, and on the field of battle.
So stand there and keep your mouth shut,
and listen to your orders from your superiors!”

Thus Odysseus commanded the men
as he moved through the befuddled army
by the ships. Finally, though still agitated,
they rushed back from the ships and tents and reassembled,
bringing with them a colossal roar of voices,
like searurf roaring up the sea-shore from the deep.

Now each man sat, and received orders to remain
where they sat : and of them all, there was one man
who kept speaking. Thersites. Endlessly his tongue
brewed abusive words about one and all.
He was a man of many words, but celebrated
as the keeper of the meanings of very few
of the ones he used when challenging the word
of a king. Imagine a mind without order,

spilling out words willy-nilly, with no knowledge
 whatsoever to boast of. But he delivered
 whatever words he hoped would bring a laugh
 to the Argives. Of all the men who came to Troy,
 he was the unluckiest Argive of them all.
 Thersites was bow-legged : his stick-thin legs
 bowed outward even when he stood upright
 and still : and the word for this condition
 was rare even by Homer's time : *φολκός* .
 He dragged one foot when he walked. And both his shoulders
 rounded in upon his chest, so that he always
 looked sunken in, with head hanging low on his neck
 below a hunchback. And so ill-favoured was he
 at birth that the Homeric list of ills continues :
 his head tapered to a point, and weak wispy hair
 grew only here and there on it. 'The most hateful
 man in the army', agreed Achilles and Odysseus,
 for they were often victims of his unlimited insults,
 of which he knew the meanings of some of the worst;
 and his yapping abuse reached even to king and commander
 Agamemnon. Every Achaean in the army carried a just
 grudge against their leader. Thersites was somehow
 shrewd enough to use this unrest in his favour,
 to get laughs. But his relentless abuse emerged
 from a squeaky, high-pitched, far-resonating voice
 that, however humorous, was hard for everyone to bear
 for long, though the man never stopped talking.

Now, amid the men, he shouted abuse at Agamemnon :

"Son of Atreus!" he cried. "Now what? Your tent is full

of bronze! Countless women lie there, gifts of honour
 from your army, each one plucked from the spoils
 whenever we obliterate a citadel in your honour!
 Perhaps you're lacking in gold? No, it can't be that!
 Why not just have some boy of Ilium snatched,
 and get his horse-breeding father to hand over
 Trojan gold as ransom for his son? whom
 I and others will bring you all bound up
 for your convenience! Or a woman's on your mind?
 Or rather a girl, with whom you'd lie with in love
 and keep her all for yourself, apart from the rest!

Farcical! That the king himself leads the army
 into anarchy! Imbecilic 'sons of the Achaeans',
 in this rotten sun you men have mellowed
 into women! Unwholesome leftovers!
 Drones and clogs!

Let us do nothing short of sailing home!
 We'll leave our honoured king here on his own
 to pleasure himself with his many prizes!
 When the Trojans come to disjoint his parts,
 he'll have agonizing leisure to think on
 how valuable the Achaean army was to him!

Even now, he disrespects Achilles!
 Consider Achilles, a man far better
 than Agamemnon, as every soldier knows;
 yet our king plucked the prize of Achilles
 from his fingers, from the hand that took
 the prize in the first place! And king Agamemnon

keeps her for himself, and deprives δῖος Achilles
 of her charms! But no, no, absolutely not!
 There is no rage in the spirit of Achilles;
 such royal arrogance is beneath the warrior's spirit.
 Otherwise it would have been Agamemnon's final insult."

Thus spoke Thersites, abusing the commander
 of the army. Odysseus came to his side.
 Glaring at him from beneath dark brows,
 he rebuked him cruelly, saying :

"Thersites! Constant babbler! Like a lyre
 that sings as birds do, continuously strummed!
 Shut your mouth! You wish on your own to quarrel
 with kings? I question the gods why a man as great
 as Agamemnon, who leads countless men
 by the high walls of Troy, would have you here
 with us, the most inferior of men imaginable!

This I tell you, and this I tell you will happen :
 if you remain foolish, and I see you again
 as you are now, I will strip myself even of
 my proudest title—father of Telemachus—
 in my mania to seize you and tear away
 your cloak and tunic that hide your nakedness;
 and to hear your weeping and wailing
 as you walk back to the ships, humiliated
 out of the assembly by an Olympic beating!
 So breathe out the names of kings at your peril.
 You will do so no longer! Far better you sit
 quiet, and help end this army-wide disturbance!"

So spoke Odysseus, who then struck Thersites
 with the sceptre between his shoulder-blades.
 And he cowered on the ground, all doubled-up;
 and a heavy tear fell from his eye.

Odysseus saw the bruising he'd left
 on Thersites, then looked at the golden sceptre
 in his hands; and he smiled in his eyes.

Thersites, meanwhile, got back in position
 with a silly expression, though his fear was plain
 to see. And he wiped away his tear in the eyes
 of all the warriors watching the spectacle.
 And though they were troubled, they all laughed together.

Thus one would turn to the next man and say :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Good Odysseus has brought wisdom
 incalculable times in counsel; and in war
 he arms himself with helmet and weapons
 and stands fighting beside the rest of us;
 but now he outdoes his former glories!
 Odysseus δῖος has done us a good turn!
 He has shut Thersites up! We shall hear
 no more of that outrageous word-slinging.
 Surely his heroic courage shall vomit up
 no more abuse of our kings from his vile mind!”

So spoke the majority of the people.

By this time Odysseus destroyer of cities had come
 to stand with sceptre in hand before the entire army.
 By him stood shining-eyed Athena, and all those who saw her
 saw a minister of the people summoning all to silence,
 so that Odysseus might be heard by all sons
 of the Achaeans both near and far,
 and his words understood, and supported.

Now he addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

“Son of Atreus! Just now, the people you command
 spoke of you as a joke! They are eager to turn
 you into a proverbial ‘most despicable of men’.
 Though the people have yet to fulfil the promise
 they made when they came here with you to Troy—
 the promise to tear down the high walls of the city,
 and to obliterate everything inside—
 now like babies and widows they wail for home!

Truly the toil of battle leaves us tired
 to death, and eager to return to our children
 and wives. One month of rowing on the bench
 is enough for a man, far from his wife,
 to feel harassed; and then to face the winter
 winds incensing the waves to stop him reaching home :
 everything gets increasingly harder to bear!
 Nine years now we’ve been here.

So I'm not surprised that the Achaean army
is angry! It has stood its ground for so long a time :
but is now heading home with empty hands.

But isn't heading home empty-handed shameful
even to think of? No! Friends! We must be patient!
We must hold out here, and hope for the best—
that the prophecies of Calchas are true!"

And Odysseus paused his speech, marking the silence
of the army before him, then continued on :

"In the hearts of everyone here, who yet have all
outrun the goddesses of fate, you remember well,
as if but a day has passed, when all our ships
were gathered at Aulis, burdened with sorrow
for the troubles of Priam and the Trojans.
There was a spring flowing clear up out of the earth.
Around it we were sacrificing on our holy altars
the hecatombs that give delight to the immortals.
There was a beautiful plane-tree, and at its root
gushed the bright water. Then a tremendous sign
from heaven came near. It was a serpent,
a gory-looking creature coloured flame-red
on its back : a prodigy terrible to look on,
for the Olympian himself had brought it to us.
In the daylight it darted out from under
the altar and raced to the trunk of the plane-tree.
Now on the tree's highest branch a nest held the little
ones of a sparrow, eight tender nestlings
trembling beneath the leaves; and the mother

was the ninth. And we listened to the pitiful
cries of the little ones as the snake coiled up
and began to swallow them, one by one,
while the mother circled round and round
overhead, grieving for her little ones.

Then the snake sprung onto the mother's wing
as she flew shrieking. So the flame-coloured serpent
devoured the sparrows, then slipped out of the light,
vanishing under the altar by the clear-gushing spring.
When we looked, the serpent was changed to stone,
and we knew Zeus himself had brought this to us.
We stood amazed, and wondered what it meant.
A terrible sight had disrupted our holy sacrifice!
So prophet Calchas straightaway addressed our assembly :

'I ask you, mighty Achaeans, why have you become silent?
This sign has Zeus brings to us will one day be true,
and its fame shall live always! Nine sparrows, nine years!
Just so long shall we fight there! But in the tenth year
we shall obliterate the city down to dust!
So come now! Achaean warriors, be patient!
The city of Priam is yours to take!'"

So spoke Odysseus. And the army raised a mighty shout
of praise that echoed all round the ships : for the men
approved the words of their godlike Odysseus.

Then the horseman of Gerenia, Nestor, spoke :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Are you idiot children sitting in debate?
Or are you warriors engaged in battle?

What about all our treaties? all our oaths?

What will become of all our promises?

What will our word mean to anybody?

No! Let all our councils, all our plans, all our pouring out
of unmixed wine, all our pledges with right hands raised :
fling it all into the fire!

Behold, men! We waste our time with words, which won't bring victory!

You, son of Atreus, Agamemnon, leader of Achaeans,
shall not be pressed like an olive! You shall stand unmoved in will,
and lead the men through mighty fights! You will ignore
those like Thersites, or Achilles, who speak foolishly here,
or plan in secret elsewhere—and no good will come
of all their devising! Let them be the first
to return to Argos! Let them live out their lives
never coming to know the voice of Zeus!

No. If any man is so eager to return to the waves—
go on! Let him put his hand to his ship. And then
he shall quickly meet his death before our eyes!”

Then Nestor paused in his speech, marking the silence
of the army before him; then he continued :

“Now, king and commander Agamemnon,
hear my reasoning, and depend upon it :
there is no worthless word that I shall speak!

Arrange the men back into their separate clans.

Clansman must help clansman. These clans, tribes, brotherhoods :

they must all support one another!
 If you do this, and if the Achaeans obey
 in this, we will find which warriors still with us
 are the best we have, and which are weaklings :
 for the clans will fight within themselves to find their leaders.
 Then, once and for all and for all time we shall come
 to know if Olympian Fate and Destiny
 are on our side—and we take the city!

Or if we are to fail because of men :
 their cowardice; or brainlessness in war.”

Then king and commander Agamemnon answered :

“Again, mighty Nestor, you prevail in speech
 before the assembly of the sons of the Achaeans!
 By father Zeus, by Athena, by Apollo,
 if I had ten more such counsellors around me
 then Priam would stand now with head bent before me,
 and his proud city obliterated to dust,
 which a little water would wash clean from our hands!

But Zeus brings me pointless quarrel and confusion,
 and I suffer through it! Achilles and I
 have butted heads with hard words over a girl,
 and I admit before you all that it was I
 who first brought that pointless quarrel to fruition.
 But once more we must function as one mind.
 Then the Trojans will have spent their last hours alive,
 and evil will visit without delay!

So this is what we are to do. All warriors!
 Go to your meal. Then we will wake Ἄρης .
 Each man sharpen his sword well.
 Each man buckle up his shield well.
 Look well to your horses, and give them food.
 Look round your chariots well, and ready them
 for the fight. Everything done well, so all day long
 we'll hold up strong in combat. There shall be no rest,
 not the least, till night comes to part the furious
 warriors. I don't want to see a man but whose
 shield straps round his shoulders reek with sweat,
 and whose hand hangs heavy from forcing the spear,
 and whose horse shines with sweat, as it brings back
 its glittering chariot. Then we will have taught Troy
 the price of sighing for the beauty of Helen!

And if I see any man away from the fight,
 standing apart by the propped ships, believe these words,
 for they're certain : that man will be food for dogs and birds!"

So he said, and the men shouted out in approval
 like a wave crashing against a high headland,
 when the South Wind comes to shove it forward
 through all the other waves from all the other winds
 churning round the cliff. Then they rose up and scattered
 in haste back to their ships, where they lighted fires
 in their tents, and ate their meal. Then each man sacrificed
 to the gods who have neither beginning nor end;
 and prayed that he might get through the next hours
 alive. King of men Agamemnon slit the throat
 of a fat bull, five years old, as a gift for hyper-mighty

Zeus; and he let various of the elders,
 the best of the Achaeans, to each raise a call
 to the god : Nestor, first; then King Idomeneus;
 then the two Ajaxes; and then Diomedes,
 son of Tydeus; and sixth and last, Odysseus,
 who in plans was as fertile as the gods.

Then Menelaus appeared, though uninvited;
 and he instantly forgave his brother this slip,
 for he knew just how many thoughts burdened king and commander.

All the men gathered round the bull, and took the barley in hand,
 and Agamemnon prayed aloud :

"Zeus, highest, who moves the dark clouds, and is the air :
 May the sun not set, nor darkness come, till I have
 pulled Priam's palace down into smoke, and everything
 between door and door is burning away, and my sword
 pierces Hector's tunic, now ragged from the bronze;
 and round his body many of his people join him in the dust."

So he spoke, but not yet did Zeus bring this to be.
 The god, though welcoming the gift of sacrifice,
 in reply only escalated the fury of battle.

So when they had prayed, and sprinkled the barley meal,
 they drew back each beast's neck and slit its throat.
 Then flayed each body; and cut away the thigh-slices
 and wrapped them in a double layer of fat,
 and laid raw pieces of flesh on top. They burned up
 all this on a pile of leafless branches.

The inward parts they fixed to spits and held over
 the fire of Hephaestus. Then, when the thigh-slices
 were fully burnt, and they had tasted the inward parts,
 they cut up the rest and spitted the pieces
 and held them over the fire, and roasted everything
 skilfully, then drew off the spits. When all the work
 was done, and the meal was prepared, they feasted,
 and no heart went unfulfilled at the feast.

Then when they were satisfied with the food and drink,

master of horses Nestor spoke out :

“Agamemnon, of all kings most glorious,
 let us sit here no further, let us no further
 delay the work that god has dropped into our hands.
 So come now! Let us issue the call to assembly
 at the ships, and bring up the bronze-wearing warriors
 in close order through the camp, and quickly waken
 fierce Ἄρης .”

Thus spoke Nestor, and Agamemnon heard.

He ordered his ministers to gather the men.

Straightaway all the ministers summoned
 loudly all the long-haired Achaeans to war.

And all the kings standing round Agamemnon
 returned to their troops, and arranged them well.

And through all the bustle moved shining-eyed goddess Athena,
 holding the precious αἰγίς , the shield both ageless
 and undecaying. Seeing it brought a man pain,
 it was too beautiful to see : with its hundred

tassels of well-plaited pure gold thread
fluttering in the air, each one bright as the sun,
and as priceless. With this she sparked like lightning
through the army camp of the Achaeans,
urging them on, and arousing in the heart
of each man an implacable courage
and ceaseless desire to fight in furious battle.
Now their dear homelands were utterly forgotten;
their sweetest thoughts were of the battlefield.

As a great fire burns a forest immense along a ridge
of mountain peaks, and the light is visible from far,
just so, coming from the bronze, was a heavenly
shining, bright as the sun, filling the air entire
and rising up past the limit of sight to the home of the gods.

Like airborne assemblies of birds, fully-fledged,
flying over the meadows by the Caystrian streams,
the geese and the cranes, flapping here and there,
rejoicing in their wings; and crying as they perch,
and the meadows resound with the outcry of birds :
just so, many clans poured out from the ships and tents
and spilled onto the plain of the Scamander,
and the earth rumbled fearfully beneath the tramp
of men and horses. So they came to stand
on the plain of the Scamander, an army of men
countless as the leaves and flowers that come to be
each season of spring.

Just as all the flies whirling round in the sheep-folds
of the flocks on the farms in the season of spring

when the milk spills over the pails : just so, many
 were the assembly of Achaean soldiers
 arrayed on the plain, eager to destroy
 the great city of Troy.

And when broad flocks mingle while grazing in the fields,
 but the goat-herders sort easily the herds back to order,
 just so had the leaders brought the men into shape,
 and now led them in close order formation into battle.

Within the army of men went King Agamemnon;
 and all his warriors saw him as Zeus Endless Thunderer.
 He showed all the grace of Ἄρης and Ποσειδῶν :
 in his sharp eyes, in his powerful chest.

In a flock overspreading a field, one great bull
 will stand out pre-eminent above the rest,
 and his superiority is conspicuous to all
 who see; just so, as most extraordinary of men among
 all the great men that day, Zeus placed Agamemnon
 as most prominent of heroes among heroes.

The Catalogue of Ships

Now, Muses, goddesses breathing the fresh air of Olympus :
 Inspirers of Art! Faculty of Artfulness itself,
 that allows all the Arts to breathe out into life!
 You, the beginning, the origin of Art and Memory!
 Speak now, Muses! who are, and who are present

here and everywhere, and know everything that is,
while we men know only Rumour, and nothing more.

Speak of the leaders and kings of the Danaans.

Of the multitude of men consolidated
as one army—no, not even if ten tongues
fluttered within ten mouths with voice implacable,
and the spirit inside me was of bronze,
could I make mention of that from end to end,
unless the Muses, daughters of Zeus, summoned it
to memory, and brought back all that happened at Ilium.

Now, in entirety, I shall speak of the leaders and kings
of the fleets of the ships, and in refined order.

Of the Boeotians, Peneleos τε Leïtus were ἄρχων ,
τε Arcesilaus τε Prothoënor τε Clonius :
τε those who lived in Hyria, τε rocky Aulis,
τε Schoenus τε Scolus τε mountainous Eteonus;
τε Thespeia, τε Graia; τε broad, grassy Mycalessus;
who lived around Harma τε Eilesium τε Erythrae;
who held Eleon τε Hyle τε Peteon τε Ocalea τε broad city Medeon;
τε Copae, τε Eutresis, τε Thisbe, where doves fly;
who inhabited Coroneia; τε grassy Haliartus;
who held Plataea; and lived in Glisas;
who held high citadel Thebe
and the splendid grove of Poseidon in holy Onchestus;
who held Arne and its fertile vineyards; καὶ Mideia
καὶ Nisa; καὶ τε most sacred Anthedon, far remote.
The Boeotians came with ships fifty;

on each came youths one hundred and twenty.

With the Minyae who lived in Aspledon τε Orchomenus

came ἄρχων Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, son of Ares.

Ialmenus was conceived in secret

in the palace of Actor, who entered the inner chamber

of the no-longer-bashful maiden Astyoche.

With these, thirty hollow ships came in ordered advance.

ἄρχων of the Phocians were Schedius and Epistrophus,

sons of great-hearted Iphitus, Naubolus' son;

these held Cyparissus τε rocky Pytho;

τε sacred Crissa καὶ Daulis καὶ Panopeus;

these held Anemoreia, τε Hyampolis;

who raised homes by δῖος river Cephissus;

who held Lilaea by the springs of Cephissus.

Of the Phocians forty black ships came

in ordered rows, and prepared for battle,

sailing in with the Boeotians on their left.

Ajax came as leader of the Locrians.

Ajax, the speedy son of Oïleus, not the great

Ajax Telamon's son, not nearly so :

this Ajax was a little man with breast-plate of linen;

but as spearman he surpassed all Achaeans and Hellenes.

These lived in Cynus τε Opus τε Calliarus τε

Bessa τε Scarphe τε elegant Augeiae

τε Tarphe; καὶ Thronium, amid the many streams

of river Boagrius. In forty black ships came the Locrians,

who lived beyond holy Euboea.

καὶ those who held Euboea, the Abantes,
 breathing rage; who held Chalcis τε Eretria;
 καὶ Histiaea, where grape-bunches clustered;
 τε Cerinthus on the sea; τε Dion on the high peaks;
 who held Carystus; and lived in Styra.
 Descended-of-Ares Elephenor,
 Chalcodon's son, was leader and ἄρχων
 of the great-hearted Abantes.
 With him came his long-haired warriors,
 incoming spearmen thrusting through enemy breast-plates
 murderous ashen spear-points.
 With him came forty black ships.

καὶ those who held Athens, deep-rooted city,
 the people of high-spirited Erechtheus,
 whom the grain-gifting soil brought to life.
 Far-seeing Athena Zeus Goddess raised him there
 in her own sumptuous grove. Athenian youths,
 even now, sacrifice bulls and rams there
 amid the poplar trees, praying for mercy.
 With them as leader was Menestheus, Peteos' son.
 I would say that no man had yet been born
 with his skill for ordering horses and arranging
 shield-bearing men. Nestor alone
 might challenge him in this, for he was the older
 and more experienced. With him came fifty black ships.

Ajax from Salamis led twelve ships, and placed them
 where the Athenians had gathered in a line of battle.

καὶ those who held Argos, καὶ high-walled Tiryns;

τε Hermione τε Asine, mutually touching the hem of the sea;

τε Troezen, τε Eiones, τε vine-rich Epidaurus;

and the Achaean youths that held Aegina καὶ Mases;

—all these Diomedes led alongside Sthenelus,

eminent Capaneus' much-loved son.

And a third came with them : godlike Euryalus,

son of King Mecisteus, son of Talaus.

Diomedes, he of the fierce war cry, held foremost command.

With them came eighty black ships.

καὶ those who held Mycenae, powerful city;

καὶ opulent Corinth, καὶ well-built Cleonae;

καὶ those who lived in Orneae; καὶ fair Araethyrea;

καὶ Sicyon; all those whose first king was Adrastus.

καὶ those who held Hyperesia, καὶ high Gonoessa

καὶ Pellene; and dwelt all over Aegium

τε Aegialus τε wide Helice.

With them came one hundred ships.

ἄρχων : son of Atreus, King Agamemnon.

With him followed many of the finest people.

Among them he put on his shining armour,

and went proudly along as the most distinguished

of the warriors, for he was the foremost man

and led the greatest number of people.

καὶ those who held the cavernous land of

Lacedaemon, split with many ravines;

τε Pharis, τε Sparta, τε Messe, where doves fly;

τε those who lived in Bryseae, τε beautiful Augeiae;

τε those who held Amyclae, τε Hele, the seaside city;

τε those who held Laas; and dwelt all over Oetylus.

These King Agamemnon's brother led as ἄρχων :
 Menelaus, fierce with the battle cry.
 Bringing sixty ships, he positioned them
 apart from the rest. He himself moved among them,
 trusting in his readiness, encouraging his men
 into war. Above all, his heart burned for vengeance,
 for all the bitterness and sorrow brought by Helen.

καὶ those who lived in Pylos, τε radiant Arene;
 τε Thryon, famed river-passage to Alpheius;
 τε Aepy; τε those who lived in Cyparisseis,
 τε Amphigeneia, τε Pteleon τε Helos τε Dorion
 —where the Muses ambushed Thamyras
 the Thracian and extinguished his singing :
 for while travelling from Eurytus of Oechalia
 he boasted in bold declaration that he would prevail
 even if the Muses themselves, daughters of Zeus, sang against him!
 So in their rage they mutilated him.
 They took away his divinely sweet song
 and he abandoned poetry and the lyre.
 With these as leader was the tamer of horses
 from Gerenia : Nestor. And with him
 came ninety hollow ships in ordered advance.

καὶ those who held Arcadia under the high peak
 of Cyllene, by the tomb of Aepytus;
 whose warriors fought up close and hand to hand;
 καὶ those who lived in Pheneos, τε sheep-grazed Orchomenos;
 τε Rhippe τε Stratia τε windy Enispe;
 καὶ those who held Tegea, τε lovely Mantinea,
 τε Stymphalos. καὶ those who lived in Parrhasia.

With them as leader was King Agapenor,
 son of Ancaeus, who came with sixty ships.
 On each ship were many Arcadian warriors
 skilled in battle. King of men Agamemnon
 had given them the well-made ships to travel
 the wine-dark sea, the son of Atreus himself,
 for they had no interest in affairs of water.

καὶ those who lived in δῖος Elis; τε Buprasium;
 τε Hyrmine τε Myrsinos overlooking the sea;
 καὶ all those by the rock of Olen τε Aleision.
 With them were four ἄρχων bringing many Epeians :
 ten black ships followed each leader.
 Of the ten, some were led by Amphimachus
 τε Thalpius, both of the line of maiden-stalking Actor :
 the first, Cteatus' son; son of Eurytus, the other.
 Of the ten, some were led by Amarynceus' son,
 powerful Diores. And of the fourth command,
 godlike Polyxeinus was ἄρχων, son of Agathenes,
 son of Augeias.

καὶ those from Dulichium τε Echinae,
 the holy islands that lie on the far side
 of the sea, facing Elis. With them as leader
 was the destructive Meges, son of Phyleus—
 the horseman Phyleus beloved of Zeus
 who withdrew to Dulichium in rage against
 his father. And with Meges came forty black ships.

And Odysseus led the great-hearted Cephallenians,
 who held Ithaca and Neritum, which quivers constantly

with leaves. καὶ those from Krocyleia, καὶ stony Aegilips;
 τε those who held Zacynthos; τε those who dwelt around Sáme;
 τε those who held the mainland, καὶ τε those who lived on the shores
 opposite the islands. Of these was Odysseus ἄρχων ,
 who in mind was as fertile as Zeus. And with Odysseus
 came twelve ships painted red.

The Aetolians were led by Thoas, son of Andraemon.
 τε those who lived in Pleuron, τε Olenus, τε Pylene,
 τε Chalcis on the sea; καὶ rocky Calydon.
 The sons of great-hearted Oeneus were all gone,
 nor was he himself alive; and blond Meleager was dead,
 who'd been given sovereignty over the Aetolians.
 And with Thoas came forty black ships.

τε came Idomeneus from Crete as ἄρχων ,
 those who held Cnossos and high-walled Gortys;
 τε Lyctus τε Miletus τε Lycastus, all gleaming white
 from their high chalk cliffs; καὶ Phaestos τε Rhytium,
 populous cities; and all the other places
 on the island of the hundred cities.
 Of all these was Idomeneus, famous spearman, ἄρχων ;
 also Meriones, equal in fury to man-killing Enyalios.

Tlepolemus, son of Heracles, good and brave and strong,
 led nine ships from imperial Rhodes, warriors from cities
 Lindos τε Ialysos τε Camirus, built on the white chalk.
 Tlepolemus was ἄρχων . Renowned in war, he was born
 to Heracles by Astyoche, whom he'd taken from Ephyre
 by the river Selleis, when he'd conquered many cities
 of warriors beloved of Zeus. When Tlepolemus

grew up, in a high-rising palace, he murdered his uncle
 —Licymnius, once heir to Ἴδης, but by then an old man.
 So Tlepolemus built ships, and gathered many people,
 and fled away over the sea, leaving the constant menace
 of the numerous sons and grandsons of βῆρ Heracles.
 Thus he came to Rhodes after prolonged and painful wandering.
 There, the people settled by tribes into three communities;
 and were loved by Zeus, king of gods and men,
 who showered them with magnificent wealth.

Nireus, now, led three pretty ships from Syme.
 Nireus, son of Aglaïa and King Charops.
 Nireus, the most beautiful of Danaans
 to come to Troy, after excellent Achilles.
 But he was weak, and few followed him.

καὶ those who held Nisyros, καὶ Carpathos, καὶ Casos καὶ Cos;
 τε city of Eurypylus; τε the Calydnian islands.
 These were led by Pheidippus τε Antiphus,
 the sons of King Thessalus, son of Heracles.
 And with them came thirty hollow ships.

Now all those who lived in Pelasgian Argos;
 in Alos, τε Alope, τε Trachis; and who held
 Phthia, τε Hellas καλλι-γύναικα
 (oasis of beautiful women) :
 all those called Myrmidons, and Hellenes, and Achaeans :
 they came in fifty ships with ἄρχων Achilles.
 Yet not a one of them thought of clangorous war,
 for no one ordered them into formation.
 He lay there languorous among his ships,

quick-footed δῖος Achilles,
 breathing rage over Briseïs—gorgeous girl
 whom he'd carried out of Lyrnessus only
 after great struggle, when the city was finally
 obliterated along with the walls of Thebe.
 He'd cut down warriors Mynes and Epistrophus,
 sons of King Evenus, Selepius' son,
 but only after heated contention with the spear.
 So now he lay idle, grieving over her loss.
 Soon he would rise.

καὶ those who held Phylace; τε Pyrasus, full of flowers;
 τε the holy ground of Demeter, who freely gives us gifts
 up from the soil; τε Iton, where many sheep nibble;
 τε Antron by the sea; τε Pteleos, of broad meadowlands.
 With them as leader was Ἴαρος-like Protesilaus,
 while he lived. Now the black earth holds him forever.
 And the two tender cheeks of his new-wedded wife
 were torn open with her fingernails from grief.
 She, Laodamia, was left in Phylace in a house but half-
 built. But he was the first of the Achaeans to leap
 from the ships and charge the Trojan shore : and a Dardanian
 warrior killed him in the surf that washed his footprints away.
 And though his men missed their ἀρχόν , they needed someone to lead;
 and Podarces, an heir to Ἴαρος , maintained order.
 He was son of Iphiclus, prosperous with sheep; and grandson
 of Phylacus; and the very brother of courageous, great-
 hearted Protesilaus. But Podarces was the younger
 of the two, and the older was the better and the stronger
 man : hero Protesilaus. So while an ἀρχόν had come,
 all grieved for the excellent one that was lost.

They came in forty black ships.

τε those who lived in Pherae, by the holy lake Boebeïs,
in which, they say, goddess Athena once bathed her feet;
τε in Boebe τε Glaphyrae τε high-rising lolcus.

These came in eleven ships led by Eumelus,
much-loved son of King Admetus. His mother was Alcestis,
most beautiful of the daughters of Pelias.

καὶ those who lived in Methone καὶ Thaumakie;
καὶ those who held Meliboea καὶ rocky Olizon.

They came in seven ships led by master archer
Philoctetes; each ship advancing by the effort
of fifty rowers experienced in handling the bow
in battle. But Philoctetes was now left behind
on the island of most holy Lemnos,
suffering terribly with a bleeding wound
delivered by a deadly-minded water-snake.
Watching him writhing in anguish, the sons of the Achaeans
had gone away and onward. There he lay in monstrous pain.
One day soon the Argives by their ships would come to remember
Philoctetes. And though his men missed their ἀρχόν ,
they needed someone to lead. Medon brought order,
whom Oïleus fathered with glowing nymph Rhene :
another bastard son of Oïleus, wrecker of cities.

καὶ those who held Tricca καὶ stony Ithome;
καὶ Oechalia, city of Eurytus of Oechalia.
τε ἄρχων were the two sons of Asclepius,
the great healers Podaleirius τε Machaon.
With them came thirty black ships.

τε those who held Ormenius and the Hypereian spring,
 bathing-place of goddesses; τε Asterium;
 τε Titanus—warriors in white-plumed helmets of dogskin.
 Eurypylus led them, shining son of Euaemon.
 With him came forty black ships.

καὶ those who held Argissa. καὶ those who raised homes
 in Gyrtona, τε Orthe, τε Elone, τε bright city of Oloösön.
 All these Polypoetes led as ἄρχων : he-who-holds-his-ground,
 son of Peirithous, a son of Zeus. On the very day
 he brought vengeance on the hairy centaurs,
 forcing them out of Pelion and driving them to the tribe
 of Aethices, he lay with the splendid Hippodameia
 and conceived Polypoetes. With him came Leonteus,
 an heir to Ἄρης , son of lively-spirited Coronus,
 son of Caenus, who was both man and woman.
 With them came forty black ships.

From Cyphus came Gouneus with twenty-two ships.
 With him came Enienes τε Peraebi,
 hard to vanquish. They lived around cold Dodona,
 and the quiet fields of river Titarisios,
 whose beautifully clear waters run in with
 the river Pineios, yet does not mingle with
 the river Pineios and its silvery rushing waters,
 but flows through and onward, smooth as olive oil :
 for the river Pineios is a branch of the Styx :
 the dread oncoming of death, which no one escapes.

And the Magnetes had as ἄρχων Prothous,

Tenthredon' son. These lived around the Pineios
 τε Pelion, which quivers constantly with leaves.
 And they were led by the quick-moving Prothous.
 With him came forty black ships.

These were the kings and leaders of the Danaans.
 But of all of these warriors, tell me, Muse,
 who was the best? The best of the horses,
 and the best of men, who followed Agamemnon?

Of the horses, far the finest were from Pherae,
 the mares of King Admetus, son of Pheres;
 and Eumelas drove them as fast as birds fly :
 perfectly matched in age, in coat, and in height.
 Silver-arrowed Apollo had reared them in Pereia;
 and with them they brought fury into battle.

Of the men, far the finest was Telamonian Ajax—
 while δῖος Achilles brooded in rage. Achilles was far
 the best of them. His horses, too, were excellent.
 But just now he sat by his pointed sea-crossing ships,
 burning in rage at Agamemnon, leader of the people.
 So his men amused themselves by the seashore,
 throwing the discus, and aiming the javelin,
 and engaging in the fine art of archery.
 And his horses stood, each by their own chariot,
 grazing on the clover and wild celery
 covering the marshy ground. And the chariots
 stood covered up. So his men, waiting for their ἀρχὸν
 to stand, roamed here and there up and down the camp,
 away from the fighting.

So they advanced like a groundswell of fire,
 and the earth trembled under them, as under Zeus
 High Endless Thunderer, who lashes the country
 round Typhoeus in the land of the Arimi—
 it's said you'll find there the bed of Typhoeus.
 In like manner the ground rumbled as they moved across the plain.

And a rainbow brightened the sky :
 Swift Iris, who walks with the wind, came down
 with a word from Zeus Orderer—unpleasant news for Trojans.

As she swooped in, the Trojans were together,
 speaking in assembly at Priam's palace gates,
 a gathering of both young men and the elders.

And Iris appeared in shape and voice of a son
 of Priam's : Polites, who was a quick-footed
 watchman who sat atop the ancient tomb
 of Aesyetes, waiting for any Achaeans
 to come from their ships. Now she spoke as he :

"Most worthy sir, you speak on and on
 as if we're at peace. But war is coming!
 It's not on the way—it's here! I've faced many
 warriors in combat before now, but
 I've yet to see an army like this one.
 It's like looking at the leaves, or the sands
 by the sea. They're marching over the plain,
 right now, to annihilate our city!

Hector—I speak to you directly : hear my word.
All through our huge city of Priam there are men
of foreign speech from all over the earth,
one after another. So let this follow from that :
command each to give the sign to the men
under his leadership, and lead them out
of the city, and in ordered array.”

So spoke Iris.

And Hector alone saw the aura of the goddess,
and knew those words were hers. So at once he dismissed
the assembly, and all rushed to arm themselves.

All the gates were opened, and the people streamed out,
both foot-forces and charioteers, raising thunderous sound.

Now, outside the city walls, standing alone
out in the plain, with grass growing all round,
was a mound of earth, high and steep, which the people
called Bateia, but the immortals knew it
as the tomb of the far-springing Amazon queen Myrine.
Here the Trojans and their allies composed
themselves into companies, combining forces.

Great Hector in glinting helmet led the Trojans,
the first-born of Priam’s full many sons;
and they were greater in number by far,
and they were eager to transfix the spear.

The Trojans of the district of Dardania

had Aeneas as leader, son of Anchises,
 whom Aphrodite lay with on the ridges
 of Ida; goddess conceiving with mortal man,
 mother of noble Aeneas. He was not alone.
 With him were the two sons of Antenor,
 Archelochus and Acamas, both expert in war.

And those who lived in the deepest valleys of Ida,
 prosperous men who drank dark Aesepian water,
 the Troes, who were led by the excellent son
 of Lycaon, Pandaros, whose skill with the bow
 was taught him by Apollo.

And those who held Adrasteia, and the land
 of Apaesos; and who held Pityeia; and the high
 mountain of Tereia. These were led by Adrastus
 and Amphius, whose breast-plate was of linen,
 the two sons of Merops of Perkote,
 who was well-skilled in the visionary
 art of divination, and would not have
 his sons march off into slaughterous war.
 But his sons did not obey him, for the fates
 were leading them into a dark death.

And those who lived in Perkote and Praktius,
 and who held Sestos and Abydos, and lovely
 Arisbe. These were led by Hyrtacus' son
 Asius, a teacher of men : Asius,
 who brought sleek horses from the river Selleïs,
 in lovely Arisbe.

And Hippothous, who led the Pelasgian tribes
 of spearmen, those who lived in fertile Larissa.
 With him was Pylaeus, an heir to Ares,
 and both were sons of Lethus, son of Teutamus,
 of the Pelasgi.

Acamas and warrior Peiroös led the Thracians,
 all those from over the strong-flowing Hellespont.

Euphemus led the Ciconian spearmen,
 son of Troezenus and grandson of Ceos,
 beloved of Zeus.

Pyraechmes led the heavily-armed Paeonians
 from far off Amydon by the river Axius :
 Axius, the clearest, brightest water on earth.

Pylaemenes of the gruff heart led the Paphlagonians
 from Eneti, where a wondrous race of half-asses
 ran wild. These people held Cytorus, and lived
 around Sesamon, and had houses by the river
 Parthenius, and Cromna, and Aegialus,
 and high-reaching Erythini.

And Odius and Epistrophus led the Halizones
 from far away Alybe, where men first found silver.

Chromios led the Mysians with Ennomus,
 who read the flight of birds. But all his prophetic
 reading didn't save him from a dark fate.
 He was killed by quick-moving Aeacus

in the river, alongside other of Aeacus' victims.

Phorcys and godlike Ascanius led the Phrygians
from far off Ascania, and both eagerly awaited
combat.

Mesthles and Antiphos led the Maeonians,
the two sons of Talaemenes, whose mother
was the Gygaean lake. They brought the Maeonians
from their dwellings at the foot of Mount Tmolus.

And Nastes led the Carians βαρβαρόφωνος—speaking
a simple tongue—who held Miletus, and Phthires,
the mountain with foliage denser to a smoothness,
and the river Maeander, and the steep heights of Mycale.
With him was Amphimachus. Chiefs Nastes and Amphimachus,
the illustrious children of Nomion. This Nastes came
into battle wearing golden ornaments like a silly girl;
but all that gold brought no defense from a miserable death.
He was killed in the river by quick-moving Aeacus,
and Achilles carried off the gold.

Sarpedon led the Lycians with the incomparable
Glaucus, from far away Lycia, where river Xanthus swirls.

End of Book II

Book III

When the Trojan army stood in ordered array
by their leaders, with a word they rushed forward
like voracious birds shrieking and screaming,
as cranes, a wintery omen, fleeing thunderstorms
and pelting rain, rise in the sky before heaven,
and with noisy skirr fly towards Oceanus
and bring ruin and death to the little men
by the streams, when they swoop in at rosy
dawn, despoiling and devouring.

But the Achaeans advanced coolly, in silence,
breathing fury, each keen to defend the next.

As when upon the mountain peaks the South Wind pours down a mist,
unpleasant for the shepherd, but for the thief an opportunity
better than blackest night, for ranged flocks can be easily plucked :
and a man sees ahead only so far as a stone can reach :

in this way, from beneath their feet, rose a cloud of dust swirling
and dense, while they marched over the plain.

When the two armies were near to one another,
out walked from the Trojans godlike Alexandros,
known also as Paris. In place of shield he held
a panther-skin draped over a shoulder. Draped
also upon him were his curved bow and sword;
and with a sharp-tipped spear in each hand he challenged
the Achaean army to send forth its best,
to fight face to face in rageful combat.

The eyes of Menelaus narrowed at the sight of Paris,
approaching with long, confident strides,

even as a lion is pleased to find an antlered deer
or wild goat, dead on the ground, when he's hungry;
and he devours it eagerly, though hounds and hunters
approach : just so was Menelaus pleased to see Paris,
for vengeance saw the sinner. From his chariot, then,
in his armour, he sprang to the ground.

The eyes of Paris widened at the sight of Menelaus,
and suddenly he stood in shame before both armies.
So he withdrew back into the crowd of his ranks,
postponing fate. Like a man who sees a snake
and leaps back, in the deep of a mountain ravine,
and quivering in body steps away with pale face :
in just this way did godlike Alexandros retreat;
abashed, for the moment, and therefore weakened,
for the moment, and so he feared Menelaus.
So he sank back into the crowd of the courageous Trojans.

Hector watched his royal brother's shameful retreat.
So he reproved the other with hard words :

"Paris!" he said. "Of the good and the bad!
A beautiful-looking, woman-crazy fraud.
You . . . ! It would have gone quieter with us
if you'd gone unborn. Or at least lie down
only once, on long death's eternal day.
Rather than take the looks of men

who eye disgrace and lower their heads in disgust.
 These long-hairs laugh at us. They think we've just sent forth
 our first among us, for your outward beauty claims so.
 And just now their thoughts are clear for us to hear :
 'This pretty one had the daring to take our woman?'

Paris, where's the strength and courage you had
 when you crossed over the sea with your friends
 and carried away back with you a beautiful
 woman, only the sister-in-law of King Agamemnon,
 who, as you can see, has friends of his own,
 who love the spear. And now you know what you brought back :
 misery. Misery for your father, and for all of us.
 And mockery from your enemies; and humiliation
 to yourself. Why is your head not lowered in shame
 before me? When you were there over the sea,
 was it then you had the strength to face Menelaus?
 Then, you would have come to know the sort of man
 blessed with such loveliness in a wife.
 Now, however, your lyre offers you no defence.
 Not a one of those gifts of Aphrodite will help you
 —that fairly arranged hair, that famously handsome face—
 when you come to lie in the dust.

And truly I think

the Trojan people are wondrous cowards,
 or plain lazy. For all the wrongs you've done to them
 they should have thrown around you a tomb of stone."

And (θεο-ειδής) "godlike" Alexandros answered him :

“Your reproach is just, Hector. And as straightforward as always.
 Always your heart comes on like the axe driven through the timber,
 contriving to cut away and artfully shape.
 As for those ‘gifts of Aphrodite’, what makes you
 so incensed with the thought of them? In deploring
 my beauty you thereby taunt the gods, who give us
 such things, and no one would willingly refuse them.

Well then. Let’s get on with making war, then, correct?
 Sit the Trojans down, and the Achaeans,
 and set me with this Ἄρης-loving Menelaus
 in the middle, and we’ll fight for Helen,
 and everything that’s hers. He who proves the superior man,
 let him take all the woman home.

Everyone else here swear oaths of friendship,
 with sacrifice. And Troy lives here, on its deep soil;
 and they go back to Argos and breed their horses,
 and to Achaea καλλιγύναικα .”

So he spoke, and Hector approved his words,
 and walked out into the wide empty space
 separating the opposing armies.

Then he faced the battle lines of his Trojans,
 and he raised up his spear, setting it even
 with the ground by holding it at its middle :
 and his army saw this, and they all sat down.

Meanwhile, the Achaeans were bending their bows
 at him, aiming their arrows tight from head to foot;

and many had stones ready to shower at him.

But Agamemnon shouted, his voice carrying far :

“Hold, Argives! Youths of the Achaeans! No striking!
Hector of the glinting helmet prepares to speak to us!”

He said this, and all his army loosened their tightening hands,
and stood in silence. And Hector spoke to both armies :

“Hear me, Trojans,” he said, “and all well-bronzed Achaeans,
the words of Alexandros, he who inspired this contention!
He proposes that Trojans and Achaeans put down their weapons
onto the earth! He himself will come here into the centre,
and meet Menelaus, he-who-is-dear-to-Ἄρης , alone
in battle, for Helen and all her wealth!
He who proves the superior man shall take all the woman home!
But for all the others here, let us all swear oaths of friendship!”

So he spoke, and all there stood in icy silence.

Then Menelaus spoke :

“Hear my words now!” he said. “It is to me these troubles have come!
The mind of youth turns with every wind, but the older sees both
ahead and behind, so all may be rendered best in the present!
—For both sides! I say let the Argives and the Trojans stand down!
Let us stop before they happen all the many evils provoked
by the beginning that Alexandros made! Let us conclude
a treaty! We shall bring before us one black lamb and one white lamb,
and Priam himself shall stand with us when we sacrifice a third

to Highest Zeus! As for my argument with Alexandros :
 we two shall meet in the centre, and which of us death and fate
 awaits shall lie dead on the ground!"

So went the voice of Menelaus out to the two armies,
 and the Achaeans and the Trojans were content to be free
 from miserable war.

So both withdrew their chariots from formation,
 stepped down, and stripped off their armour. Each placed
 his bronze on the dirt close-by : and the weapons
 of both armies covered the quiet earth.

Hector sent two ministers into the city
 to bring the two lambs, and to summon King Priam.

And Talthibius was sent by Agamemnon
 to the ships, to bring back a lamb; and he did not
 disobey δῖος Agamemnon.

And Iris came to slender-armed Helen,
 and Helen saw her as one of the sisters
 in a palace of many sons : Laodice,
 the most beautiful of Priam's many daughters.

Helen was in her inner chamber,
 weaving a garment on her loom, a large
 purple cloak meant to be folded double,
 and she was skilfully threading in colours,
 embroidering memories of battles
 between fiery Trojan and bronze Achaean.

And stepping close to her came swift-footed Iris :

“Come now, dear child, let me show you wonderful
sights of fiery Trojan and bronze Achaean,
who, till just now, have been fighting one another,
eager for glory and annihilation, warring on the plain :
but now they stand idle, in silence, and stop their war,
each leaning on his shield, each spear-handle stuck in
the dirt hard-by. Alexandros and Menelaus
intend to fight up close for you, one against one;
whoever conquers, you shall be called his wife!”

So the goddess spoke, and nested a longing
in her heart to see her former man, and city,
and parents. Straightaway she veiled her face
in fine shining linen, and left her chamber,
dropping round, swelling tears. And two handmaids
followed her as she went : Aethra, and Clymene
of the striking eyes. And quickly they came
to the Scaean gate, the main entryway of Troy.

And the elders of the people sat on the tower
above the Scaean gate. Those around King Priam
were Panthous and Thymoetes; and three brothers
to the aged king : Lampus and Clytius and Hicetaon,
an heir to Ἄρης , long ago. Also Ucalegon
and Antenor, discreet men of wisdom.
Old age had taken them off the active
battlefield of arms, but active speakers
they were, even exceptional, as cicadas

in the forest send out their voice as delicate
 as the colour of the lily. Such were they who sat,
 and when they saw Helen approaching towards the Wall,
 murmurously they discussed her under their breath :

“Full wondrous is that beauty!” they said. “No wonder
 the Trojans and those bronze-armoured ones
 would suffer so much for a woman so marvellous
 to look upon! Delicate, exceedingly so,
 as of a goddess immortal coming before our eyes.

Still, she’s got to go. Put her on their ships
 and get her back to her house. For us, and for
 the children after us, there will be senseless trouble
 if she remains.”

All these things they spoke quietly among themselves,
 while Priam called out to Helen, to come to him :

“Come here, dear child, and sit by me, and see
 your former man, and family, and friends.
 Dear Helen, you are blameless in my eyes.
 It is the gods—destiny—who brought Ἄρησ
 of many tears to me, this war with the Achaeans.

Tell me now, by what name goes that wondrous-
 sized warrior whom I see? This Achaean man,
 clearly a distinguished hero? I’ve seen taller men
 by a head, but so handsome a man I’ve never seen
 with these eyes, nor one with such noble distinction.
 That man is a king.”

And Helen, δῖος woman, answered him :

“O honoured one, very-much-loved one, I even
call you, with my husband, ‘father’; and one I dread :
when I left my daughter, my brothers, my parents,
all my friends, and left behind my lovely house,
and came here with your son, death did not follow;
it was not to be. So I pour out all my heart
in tears. But he you ask of is Agamemnon,
both a good king and a mighty warrior.
He is also my former husband’s brother—
if I didn’t dream that part of my life.”

So Helen spoke, and the old man sat admiring,
and said :

“Ah, the fortunate son of Atreus! Born under
an auspicious star, and blessed by the gods!
And I see how many follow him, all these young Achaeans.
Long ago I went to Phrygia-of-the-vines
and saw many warriors there on the nimblest horses,
the people of Kings Otreus and astonishing Mygdon,
assembled in a camp by the banks of the Sangarius.
I was numbered among their allies on the day
the Amazons came, terrible as men.
But they weren’t as many as these bright-bronzed Achaeans.”

The old man then saw Odysseus, and he asked her :

“Come now! dear child, tell me of that man.

Shorter by a head than Agamemnon,
 yet broader in shoulders and chest. His armour
 lies on the ground, yet as he walks the lines,
 reviewing his warriors, with a word to this,
 and a touch to that, he brings to my mind
 a thick-fleeced ram commanding the white flock.”

Helen, daughter of Zeus, answered him :

“That is Laertes’ son, Odysseus πολύμητις ,
 from island Ithaca. From a rocky place came
 a very smooth man : he has all kinds of cunning about him.”

Then wise counsellor Antenor answered Helen :

“Lady, you speak true. Some time ago δῖος
 Odysseus came to us on embassy,
 concerning you, together with Ἄρης-loving
 Menelaus. I welcomed them as guests
 in my halls, and gave them a fine reception.
 I learned then of his presence, and of his mind :
 that commanding physique and his crafty thinking.

When they first made their appearance among
 the assembly of Trojans, and stood before us,
 Menelaus’ broad shoulders overdominated his;
 but when they sat, Odysseus sat more nobly.

And when Menelaus spoke among us,
 he wove an easy eloquence, one of few words—
 he was no rambling speaker. (And that man

was the younger of the two!)

So then commanding Odysseus stood to speak.
 But the πολύμητις seemed irritated—
 he kept fixing his eyes downward before he spoke,
 and held the sceptre as if it were a trifle,
 without dignity; so we thought him witless.
 You, lady, would have scorned his disagreeableness,
 and thought him a fool. But when he did speak,
 the words he sent out with impressive voice
 were like exquisite snowflakes on a winter day.
 We knew then that no man can outdo Odysseus in speech.
 And we ceased to observe the way he stood there.”

The old king then saw Ajax, and asked Helen :

“And this other Achaean, prominent over
 all the rest, with that noble look, and broad shoulders :
 who is he?”

And Helen, δῖος woman in long-flowing robe, answered him :

“That is Ajax, a tremendous defence for the Achaeans.
 Next to him, equally godly to me, is Idomeneus,
 standing with the leaders from Crete. Menelaus
 and I entertained him in our house many times,
 whenever he came to our city from Crete.
 Now I see many a man I recognize,
 and could speak of, and tell you their names;
 but two men I do not see, though I look closely.
 Castor and Polydeuces : my darling brothers,

from one and the same mother. Castor is known
 as 'tamer of horses', while Polydeuces
 is our best and most celebrated boxer.
 Perhaps they stayed at home, humiliated by their sister.
 Or maybe they've come from Lacedaemon on their ships
 and joined up with this, but stay out of the way,
 caring not for the mockery and embarrassment
 of being brothers to me."

So spoke Helen, unaware that her brothers
 were already buried in the life-giving soil,
 there in Lacedaemon, in their homeland.

The tombs of the Dioscuri would be a place
 of pilgrimage for millennia to come.

Meanwhile, Priam's ministers, including
 Idaeus, his personal attendant, had brought
 up from the city the two lambs required
 for the oaths of faith; also, in a goat-skin flask,
 the fiery wine that comes up from the soil
 and brings cheer. And Idaeus himself held
 the mixing bowl glowing bright as the day,
 and splendid golden drinking cups. He leaned
 in towards old King Priam so he could say :

"Most worthy king, son of Laomedon,
 rise, and hear the summons from the Trojans
 and the armoured Achaeans, to come down
 to the plain, there to make sincere oaths of friendship,
 ratified with sacrifice. It has been decided :

Alexandros and Menelaus will face off
 with spears for the woman, and he who prevails
 wins her, with all her wealth. As for the rest of us,
 we pledge everlasting friendship, with sacrifice,
 and we live on here in excellent Troy,
 and they go back to Argos, and to Achaea
 καλλιγύναικα.”

So he spoke, and old King Priam winced at the thought
 of his son up close in battle with Menelaus.
 Still, he directed his attendants to yoke up
 the horses, and they readily obeyed.
 And Priam came down from the tower.

At the foot of the gate, the king mounted
 his chariot and seized the reins, while
 Antenor stepped up beside him; and in
 the exquisitely ornamented chariot
 they led the swift-footed horses out of the gate,
 and onto the plain.

Thus the king went to the Trojans and Achaeans.

When he came to the two armies, he stepped
 from his chariot to the quiet-growing earth,
 and walked into the gap between all the men,
 and came to stand between the Trojans and Achaeans.

Promptly Agamemnon and Odysseus πολύμητις
 entered the gap; and also the royal ministers, bringing
 the victims for the oaths of fidelity. They mixed the wine;

and poured purifying water over the hands of the kings.
 And the son of Atreus drew his razor-sharp dagger ever
 fixed beside his sword-sheath, and cut wool off from the lambs' heads;
 and the ministers doled out equal portions to the noblest
 of the Achaeans and the Trojans.

Then Agamemnon raised up his hands in prayer :

"Zeus Father," he said, "strongest and greatest,
 ordering all from the summit of Ida;
 and you, Sun, who oversees and overhears all;
 and the rivers; and Earth; and whoever beneath
 us punishes those who speak treacherously here,
 once they've gone below, when finished with work.
 Witness us now, and keep watch on our faith hereafter.

If Alexandros kills Menelaus, let him
 then take the hand of Helen and hold all her wealth,
 and we'll go home in our ships. If Menelaus
 kills Alexandros, then the Trojans allow Helen
 to leave with us, with all her wealth; moreover
 the Trojans must make us requital in payment,
 such that those yet to come will deem it reasonable.
 But if Priam and the sons of Priam refuse this,
 if Alexandros falls, then we will stay here
 on the spot and fight until we are satisfied."

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and cut the throats
 of the lambs with the heartless bronze : then laid
 them down on the earth, gasping and quivering,
 breathing out the last of their lives, for the bronze

had cut away their spirit. Then they drew wine
from the mixing-bowl, and poured out in prayer
to the gods everlasting.

And from the armies one and another man spoke out :

“Zeus Greatest and Highest! All the immortal gods!
Whoever first undoes this oath shall have their brains
broken on the ground just as that wine flows—
theirs, and their children’s, too; and may their wives
be handed over to others as slaves!”

So they spoke, but not yet did Zeus bring any of this to be.

Then Priam spoke out :

“Hear me, all Trojans, and you well-bronzed Achaeans!
I shall now return to the city, as my eyes
can not suffer to see my son fight Menelaus.
Let Zeus and the other immortals stand patient
in the knowledge of what is destined to be.
Such knowledge I shall not wait to be given me.”

And so Priam had the two lambs placed down
gently in his chariot-box, then stepped in,
the godlike man. He gathered the reins tight
and roused his horses just as Antenor came up
beside him; and the very beautiful chariot
brought them back to the city.

Hector and Odysseus measured out a space.

Then they took two stones and dropped them in the bronze helmet.
They would draw to see which of the two would take up
the bronze-tipped spear and let fly first.

And all the people raised their hands in prayer to the gods, saying :

“Zeus Father who rules from Ida, most honoured god,
greatest god, whoever is the guilty one here,
let him die, and go down to the House of Hades;
and for the rest of us, bring friendship and trust!”

So they spoke, as Hector shook the glinting helmet,
averting his head as he did so : then he tipped it :
and Paris’ stone came out onto the dirt.

At that, both armies sat down in their lines,
where the horses pawed the earth restlessly,
and where their bright armour lay.

δῖος Alexandros put on his intricate
inlaid armour, beautiful Helen’s man.
First he armoured his legs with bent metal plates,
its ankle-pieces connected by silver clasps
that sparkled. Next, he got into his coat
of armour, that Lycaon, his brother, lent him,
and tightened all the fastenings. Round his shoulders
he hung his sharp sword with silver-ornamented
handle; and after that his shield, grand and solid.
Then on his head he fitted his well-made helmet,
crested with horsehair dyed of terrible colours.
Fearsomely the crest nodded from above;

and he took into his grip a powerful spear.

In like manner did Menelaus get into his armour.

When both stood suited for battle, each on his side,
glaring at each other from across the empty gap,
then, slowly, with menacing tread, they entered
into the spot between the Trojans and Achaeans,
keeping each other's gaze as they went. And
both armies looked on breathlessly as the two men
came to stand within the space measured off for them,
their bronze-tipped spears chafing at the air with fury.

In the hot sun those spears cast long shadows on the dirt.

First Alexandros flung his spear, and as it hit
the strong round shield of Menelaus, its tip bent
sidewise, and the limp spear dropped to the dirt.

Next Menelaus moved forward with bronze in hand,
and prayed :

"Zeus Punisher, give me vengeance on him
who first did me wrong, 'δῖος' Alexandros,
and give him death with these hands, so that those
yet to be born will hear of this, and tremble
to do evil."

As he spoke he aimed his spear, drew back, and flung it
at the well-balanced shield of Priam's son. Through it
ripped the shining tip of his spear, which pushed straight through

his intricately inlaid breast-plate and cut through
his tunic and touched a soft spot between his ribs
and hip : but he spun away and avoided death.

Menelaus rushed forward, unsheathing his sword,
and struck him hard on the crest of his helmet :
and his sword shattered into four fragments
and Menelaus flung the useless handle away.

And Menelaus shouted out savagely : “Father Zeus!”

And he rushed at him and grabbed his horsehair plume tight
in his grip, and whirled him round in sight of all,
and he thought, “Most unrelenting destructive god!
Revenge was mine on the vile Alexandros,
but my spear went awry and my sword shattered
in my hand! I have not killed him!”

He began to drag him towards the Achaean ranks,
holding him by his ornamented helmet,
and its well-stitched leather strap, buckled tight,
slipped down and around his soft throat,
and was now strangling Alexandros
as he was dragged through the dust.

Menelaus was walking towards spectacular glory—

until Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, a sharp-sighted beauty,
let the leather strap snap apart; and Menelaus was left
with an empty helmet in his hand. This the Achaean hero
flung with an angry whirl over the heads of his bronze army;

and the soldiers collected it and took it away.

Menelaus, breathing hard, was ready to kill,
but he faced empty air; for Aphrodite had snatched away
Alexandros (for what can't gods do?) and lowered him
down lightly in his sweet-scented bedchamber.
And she went off to fetch Helen.

And found her atop the great wall that surrounded
the city, standing in a crowd of Trojan women
admiring her.

And an old woman of many years stepped up close
to Helen, and took hold of her robe, its fine fabric
infused with sweet-scented perfume, and shook it :
and Helen turned to greet a wizened face looking
up at her, and she recognized the old woman
as someone she loved. Back in Lacedaemon,
when Helen had handled the loom, this woman
had smoothed the fine wool skilfully for her.

And in this image δῖος Aphrodite called her by name :

"Come now," she said to Helen. "Alexandros
summons you home. He awaits you in his chamber,
lying on his sumptuous bed within the curtains,
glowing with beauty, and splendid in his garments.
No one would think him just stepped from a battlefield;
a dance, more like : a young man off to the dance;
or, content with the dance, now sitting at rest."

So spoke Aphrodite, and roused Helen's heart
in her breast to wonder and anger both.

She was in two minds as she faced her old friend.
She saw through to the goddess' delicate throat,
and her shapely womanhood, and striking eyes :
and Aphrodite astonished her : yet she was angry, too :

"Goddess Heaven-sent!" she said. "Why would you trifle
with me this way? Maybe you're minded to lead me
further on, to Phrygia or Maeonia,
to the next place, and there love the next charming man?
I know what's happened. Menelaus has cut him down
and sent him humiliated to Hades' house,
and now wants me back. He wants my hateful self back
with him in Argos. This is why you come tricky-
minded to me. You go to him. Withdraw from the way
of the gods and leave Olympus forever,
and live with him to suffer his concerns,
and watch over him, until you're man and wife :
or you become his slave. But I? I shall not go.
No longer will I ornament his bed.
The good women of Troy would scorn me afterward.
Ah! My troubles are confused and endless!"

And heavenly Aphrodite was incensed, and said :

"Silly woman, why anger me? and have me abandon you?
And have me hate you, as much as I now love you?
I can make things miserable for you,
for the Trojans, and for Danaans alike :

and then you would suffer a terrible death.”

Thus spoke Aphrodite, and Helen recoiled,
terrified. So she went, wrapping her fine clinging
linen around her, leaving unseen, in silence,
and none of the Trojan women saw :
and Aphrodite led the way.

Inside the glittering palace of Alexandros
the handmaidens plied their domestic tasks.
Helen, meanwhile, went up into the vaulted
bedchamber. And Aphrodite of many smiles
set a chair down for Helen to sit on, facing
Alexandros. She sat down, the daughter of Zeus,
with eyes raised skyward, and spoke out harshly :

“You creep away from war? You should have been
killed on the spot—by my former husband,
a more powerful man, Menelaus,
whom you in times past reduced with cruel words,
and declared yourself supreme in strength and bravery!

Well then! Go back now and challenge Menelaus
to fight face to face—though I call that ill-advised!
Do not be senseless enough to fight warlike Menelaus.
He would bring you down.”

And Paris answered her :

“Gentle lady! No more punishment with hard words,
I beg you! Just now Menelaus has the edge,

thanks to Athena. I'll kill him soon enough :
 we have gods on our side, too. So come :
 let us lie together, as two lovers in love.
 Never has this desire burned so strong in me.
 Not when I plucked you from charming Lacedaemon,
 not when I took you away to sail the sea
 in my ships, not there on island Cranae where we
 lay together in a lover's bed—no, just now
 overwhelmingly I must have you."

So he brought Helen forward to the bed,
 and they went through its curtains and lay down.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon stalked the Trojan
 lines to and fro, a beast of prey on the lookout
 for δῖος Alexandros; but no man—Trojan,
 or any one of their illustrious allies—
 could deliver Alexandros to warlike Menelaus.
 And they were not hiding him in the great heap
 of the army out of love, for he was universally
 hated, as they hated death.

Then king of men Agamemnon spoke out to all :

"Hear me now! Trojans! and Dardanians! and allies!
 Warrior Menelaus, we see, takes victory!
 So bring us Helen! and we shall take her
 and all her wealth! And you must understand
 our taxing troubles demand requital!
 Such that those yet to come will deem it reasonable!"

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and all Achaeans cheered.

End of Book III

Book IV

The gods watched the city of Trojans from above,
seated by Zeus Father in assembly on the golden floor
of Olympus. Among them went sweet Hebe
with a wreath of platinum leaves as crown,
o goddess of youth!—Hebe poured out
the liquid nectar as they wished. The Immortals
lifted their gold cups to themselves and their work,
with Troy beneath; and Zeus straightaway challenged
wife Hera before all present, queen of all heights,
to respond to his teasing words in kind :

“Menelaus has two goddesses for helpers,
Hera of Argos and Alacomenean Athena!
How much pleasure they take in sitting here
watching—while smiling Aphrodite
ever moves with him, keeping him from death.
For just now, I think, he was about to experience it.

Surely we all agree Menelaus wins the victory?
So now we must think on this, and how things shall be.
Would you continue the clamour of evil war
through your own instigation? Or shall we
provoke friendship between all these people?

If pleasant friendship is acceptable to you,
and that King Priam’s city may stay standing high,
then allow Helen and Menelaus to return together
home to Argos.”

So Queen Hera and Athena heard Zeus.

Then, sat side by side, they murmured among themselves,
contriving to bring nasty tribulation to the Trojans.

But who cared to reply to Zeus' teasing words?

Athena withheld answer, but fury inside her
surfaced on her face, a ferocious glower
focused on her father. Queen Hera, meanwhile,
incapable of restraint, let her anger fly, and spoke :

"God of Time, what a speech!

You treat lightly what you see, these armies
mingled on the Scamander plain? You would tease me
for *that*? And all the sweat that covered me in my efforts
(let alone how weary my horses were) to assemble
that tremendous army and punish small Priam and his sons!
Do what you will; but not all gods here are overwhelmed
with your teasing. Or your decision."

Hera excited a fury in cloud-gathering Zeus :

"Wondrous queen! What evils have Priam and his sons ever worked
on you, that you so eagerly struggle to obliterate
the well-built city and the good Trojan people?
Entering his walls, and his gates, and devouring Priam
raw, and the sons of Priam, too, and all the Trojans that live,
is the only remedy for your upset? Do what you will;
I would rather this not cause conflict between us.

But hear me now, and remember these words :
in future, when I obliterate a city

where much-loved friends of yours live, don't fritter away
 your breath and anger me; but let it be;
 as I'm giving in to you here against my better judgment.

Under sparkling heaven and the sun there are many cities
 with many peoples spread over the earth, but I respected
 holy Ilium above all others, King Priam and all
 his people expert with the ashen spear.

They never failed to lay gifts on my altar,
 nor failed to pour, but ever sent up the savour
 of the sacrifice, our gift of honour, our right."

And bright-eyed Hera answered him :

"The cities I love best are Argos and Sparta
 and Mycenae of the graceful ceramics.
 Now you know. Obliterate them if they pique you,
 or even for your amusement—I'm not bothered.
 Nor will I be. We both know my displeasure
 counts for nothing. You destroy whatever you like
 and no one can stop you. But my labour should count
 for something, and not be idle effort. I, too, am a god,
 and my family, you'll remember, is your own;
 the tricky-minded Cronos is my father, too.
 But do you honour me as family? Or wife?
 No. The glorious king of the Immortals chooses to tease!

You and I must come some distance closer
 to each other. We must work together,
 you with me, and I with you; and all the other

Immortals will stand with us. Then we'll be stronger,
 if it's possible. So please command Athena
 to join the battle of Trojans and Achaeans.
 She will motivate Troy to break their oaths,
 and bring the Achaeans much hurt."

All that Hera said. And Zeus Orderer obeyed,
 if only to improve the peace of Olympus,
 and promptly spoke to Athena :

"Go then to the matched armies of the Trojans and Achaeans.
 Employ all the mind you have to find a way for Troy to break
 its oaths and bring the Achaeans much hurt."

So he spoke, and Athena, already eager,
 went hotly down from the peaks of Olympus.
 And sailors on the sea, and peoples all over,
 and both warrior armies saw a brilliant fire
 streak across the sky, the descent of Athena
 down into the crowd on the Trojan plain;
 and astonishment arose from the earth.
 The horse-taming Trojans and bronze-armoured Achaeans
 looked on with awe; and one turned to the next to say :

"Zeus has decided! He-who-orders-war-and-peace!
 Must we fight on? or is our friendship sealed?"

This the soldiers of both armies wondered.

Now many a Trojan warrior saw brave spearman
 Laodocus, son of Antenor, racing through

their disciplined lines, looking lively everywhere,
 eager to find someone. But how to find one man
 in a crowd of over one hundred thousand strong?
 Yet he found mighty Pandaros, son of Lycaon,
 easily. This excellent warrior stood with the men
 he'd brought from the river Aesepus by Ida,
 mountain sacred to Rhea, mother of all gods.
 Laodocus came close, and spoke with winged words :

"Please, hear me now, battle-wise son of Lycaon,"
 said goddess Athena, warlike maiden, in voice
 and shape of the other, "do you dare to let fly
 a death-bringing arrow into Menelaus?
 What a celebration of blessing you would win!
 All of the Trojans will lift you up in glory!
 Royal Alexandros will be especially pleased;
 he'll be the very first to honour you with gifts,
 once he sees the warlike Menelaus run through
 with your arrow, and tossed onto the flaming pyre.

So come now. Take aim at glorious Menelaus.
 And pray to Apollo of-the-wolf, who lets fly
 and hits his mark always, that you will sacrifice
 in his honour a hecatomb of newborn lambs,
 when you return home to your holy city of Zeleia."

So whispered the goddess in the ear of the man,
 who obeyed senselessly. First, he stripped off
 the covering from his shining bow, made of horn
 from a wild ibex, which he himself had taken,
 lying in wait for it; as it sprung off a rock

he let fly and hit it through to the heart;
and it fell backwards into a crack in the rock.

The horns on its head had grown sixteen rings long.
These a workman had remodelled into a bow :
assembling it, and smoothing it carefully,
and polishing it well; then fitted tips of gold.

Now mighty Pandaros lowered to a crouch,
unseen midst his warriors and their shields;
and he set his bow down carefully on the ground,
and prepared it. Then, he opened the lid
of his quiver, and drew out a feathered arrow,
fresh-made, never yet shot : a bringer of black pains.
And as he strung the sharp-tipped arrow he promised
Apollo of-the-wolf a sacrifice
in his honour of a hecatomb of newborn lambs,
when he returns home to his holy city of Zeleia.
Then with the notched arrow tight between his fingers
he drew back the bowstring, a rawhide sinew, to his chest,
and the tip of the arrow had come to the bow,
and at full stretch, he let fly. The bowstring sang
as the arrow leapt gladly out into the legion of men.

O Menelaus! Blest were the gods who watched you
from above! So Athena of-the-winds swooped in
before him, and knocked the arrow off its deadly way,
just as a mother waves aside a whirling fly
off her sleeping child. Athena Goddess sent it
into a double-layered piece of his body
armour, where breast-plate joined belt with a clasp.

The arrow tore through the leather overlap
and forced its hateful way through to the belt
that he wore as best defence against piercings;
but the arrow ripped through the belt and sliced open
the skin of the warrior, and stuck there inside
him; and dark blood gushed from the wound.

As when a woman dyes ivory with a touch
of scarlet, a lady of Maeonia or Caria,
when she hand-works a cheekpiece for horses :
and it lies in a store-room of treasures,
though many a charioteer prays to wear it :
but it lay there as a king's delight, to ornament
his own horse, and grace his charioteer :
even so were the thighs of Menelaus dyed
with blood, which ran down his powerful legs
and stained his ankles beneath him.

Agamemnon king of men shivered in terror
to see dark blood gushing from Menelaus' wound.

And Menelaus was himself concerned, till he saw
the barbs of the arrowhead—only the sharp tip
had stuck him; his belt caught the rest of the arrow.
So his warlike spirit renewed itself twofold,
and he let out a heavy sigh of relief.

But Agamemnon, hearing the sigh as a death-moan,
let out his own heavy sigh, and all the men sighed
with him. He took his brother's hand and spoke :

“Dear Menelaus! I have killed you with these oaths
and sacrifice! We have been betrayed!

Ah, something

will come of these oaths, the blood of the lambs,
the pouring of the pure wine, our welcome right hands—
everything we put our trust in! If Olympus
this very moment does not make them pay, then we will!
It doesn’t matter how long it takes—we will have
all their heads, and their wives, and their children.
Zeus allows things to be as they are, until he
ends them. I give you my solemn promise the day
will come when holy Troy is obliterated
to the last particle, with Priam, and Priam’s
people, regardless of their ashen spears.
Zeus high in heaven will answer their treachery
with black anger : and this is how it will be.

But, you, dear Menelaus, you cannot die!
What a terrible misery it would be,
if you completed your life and crossed over
to Hades. All the other Achaeans will go
straight home, and leave Argive Helen for Paris;
and when I get back to Argos I will be scorned!
Because your bones will rot the soil of Troy
with our work unfinished; and those miserable
Trojans will laugh and step all over your tomb
and say : ‘If this is how Agamemnon settles
his troubles then we’ll never have any worries!
He led his army pointlessly, and now leaves
with empty ships, and Menelaus dead!’

This they will say.—Rather let the earth swallow me up!”

And Menelaus answered him :

“All is well,” he said, “and do not alarm the men.

The shot went awry. It’s no fatal wound.

Most of it is sticking in my armour.”

And Agamemnon replied :

“I hope so, dear brother! Have a surgeon look at it, and give you some herbs for the pain.”

Then he turned to his trusted minister

Talthybius, and said :

“Sir, summon our best surgeon here quick as you can—

Machaon, son of the peerless Asclepius.

Tell him mighty Menelaus has an arrow in him (which some bastard Trojan or Lycian sent, hoping to wound us for his own glory).”

So he spoke, and his minister heard and obeyed.

He rushed through the glimmering Achaean army until he came to the warriors from Tricca.

There he found the noble Machaon, and he said to him :

“Come now! son of Asclepius, King Agamemnon summons you! Mighty Menelaus has an arrow in him, which some bastard Trojan or Lycian sent, hoping to wound us for his own glory.”

This he said. So the physician gathered his things,
then they hurried back through the myriad lines
of their forces.

They arrived at a gathering of commanders
standing in a circle, and Machaon went inside,
and came to the wounded Menelaus. At once
he drew the arrow from the belt with such force
that the barbs bent backward. Then he removed
the layers of body armour (which a metalworker
had fashioned to Menelaus' measurements),
and saw the wound where the hateful arrow had hit.
He washed away the blood, then applied some mellow
herbs given to his father many years ago
by the legendary Cheiron, teacher of men.

While the Achaean leaders were busy round Menelaus,
the Trojan leaders began preparing for battle.
So the Achaeans saw them getting into position,
and putting on their armour, and buckling up
their shields. And both armies knew that war was coming.

Then you would not have seen δῖος Agamemnon napping,
nor cowering from fear, with no heart in the fight;
but eager for combat, where men reveal themselves
as they are, and win.

His snorting horses, yoked to his chariot, were led
by his assistant Eurymedon, son of Ptolemaeus,
son of Peirareus, behind King Agamemnon,

as he went forth on foot to inspect the ranks
 of his soldiers. He had requested of his man
 to lead his massive chariot, glittering with bronze,
 should weariness weaken his legs along the way,
 as he gave orders to the various leaders
 of the massed Achaean forces. As it was,
 this day, King Agamemnon never did step up
 into his chariot, when he went through his men.

And whenever he saw contingents of Danaans
 hurrying with swift horses forward to the front
 of the lines, he smiled, and stood by, and shouted
 them godly encouragement :

“You Argives! Set upon every detail well!
 No easing of bravery even for an instant!
 For Zeus Father scorns treachery, and won’t help them!
 They were the first to spoil us, to transgress our oaths,
 so now their soft flesh will be left for vultures!
 We’ll carry away their wives, and their dear little children,
 once we’ve obliterated the city!”

And whenever he saw contingents of Danaans
 dawdling, not preparing for slaughterous war,
 he upbraided them with fearsome words :

“Are you Argives, or shameful things? Why these
 frightened faces? Prepare for battle! You cowards
 look like fawns shivering at the sight of a plain!
 Have your hearts no bravery? You stand there
 like a sorry herd of deer! Ready yourselves to fight!

Are you waiting for the Trojans to march over
 you and get to our priceless ships put up to shore?
 Are you waiting to see if Zeus will protect you?"

So he continued along the lines of warriors,
 dispensing his orders, and inspecting morale;
 and as he moved among the vastitude of men
 he came to the warriors from Crete, superior
 in combat. Just now they were arming themselves
 around their war-wise leader Idomeneus,
 who stood seething like a wild boar ready to strike.
 Meriones, meanwhile, was encouraging
 the warriors in the rear of their battle-lines.
 Seeing this, commander Agamemnon smiled,
 and addressed Idomeneus with gracious words :

"Idomeneus! You know well I honour you
 above all the Danaans that live, both in war,
 and in works of all kinds; and at the feasts,
 when the counsellors of the Achaeans
 mix the best of our sparkling wines, each drinks
 their portion, but your cup I always keep full,
 like my own, for you to drink whenever your heart
 wills it. Come now! and into battle! Show yourself
 to be what you've always been : a great warrior."

And Idomeneus, leader of the Cretans, answered him :

"Son of Atreus, therefore I shall stay as you say!
 And will keep the promise I gave you from the first.
 But some of the Achaeans around us need to get

ready for battle. Senselessly the Trojans spoiled
our oath of friendship, so now we shall bring them
pain and death.”

So he spoke, and the commander of the army
moved on, exulting at heart, through the multitude
of warriors, and came to the Aiantes—the two
Ajaxes, who will prefer to fight side by side.
Beside them marched their foot-forces, raising a dust
cloud all round. As from a place of look-out
a shepherd sees a cloud—yet far-off, but driven
by a screaming West Wind in his direction;
and sees it moving, pitch-black, over the waves
of the deep, the shadow of a terrible storm,
and he trembles to see it, and hastens his flock
into a cave : even so did the youths beside
the Aiantes move over the plain in dense, dark
battle-lines, warriors beloved of Zeus :
they marched darkly with bristling spears and shields.
And the commander of the army exulted
at heart to see this, and gave them respectful word :

“You Aiantes! Great leaders of the armoured
Argives! No need to give you any word of command!
You’ve put your men in fighting spirit! Ah, by Zeus!
and Athena! and Apollo! If only your
fire burned in the hearts of all the warriors
here! Quickly then would Priam’s lofty city
fall to dust at our hands, and be plundered!”

So spoke Agamemnon, who left them as they were

and went on to others. He found Nestor, the well-voiced speaker of the Pylians, arranging his men and rousing them with stirring words to fight. There, too, were Pelagon and Alastor and Chromius, and Haemon and mighty Bias, shepherd of men. They had put their chariots in front and the foot-soldiers behind, and Nestor was telling them all :

“In the old days, men, when we faced the enemy we threw our spears from the racing chariot. That way was thought to be the best. And men long ago took cities and walled citadels that way. But now you dismount first, then fight. If you’re brave, and trust your horsemanship, keep in mind how your mighty ancestors were minded. And be sure to keep your horses true, so you don’t trample your own soldiers.”

So spoke Nestor. As for the foot-soldiers, he put the weaker men in the centre of them : like it or not, all cowards would enter into combat.

So in this way Nestor arranged his warriors, using knowledge from battles of long ago.

Seeing this, Agamemnon smiled; and he went to Nestor, and said :

“Ah, old sir,
if only your experience were matched by youth,
your strength today would be invincible! May it be
that your great heart lifts these limbs of yours to strike

down many a Trojan! That would be best, to see
you master old age itself and look young again.”

And Nestor answered him :

“Son of Atreus, I would gladly go back to the day
I cut Ereuthalion down. As it is, I’ll go along
with the charioteers, to counsel and encourage.
Today I’ll let the young ones play the warrior.”

So he spoke, and the commander of the army
moved on, exulting at heart. He found Peteos’
son Menestheus standing in place, and standing
round him were the Athenians, masters of war.

Odysseus was standing near, by the straight lines
of the Cephallenians, a warlike people, yet
just now standing still, in silence, as if they had
yet to hear the war-cry, though many lines of warriors
were now moving forward towards battle. Yet these men
stood in place, waiting in ordered silence.

Seeing this, King Agamemnon upbraided them,
and spoke with winged words :

“Ah, son of Peteos, king beloved of Zeus!
And you, expert in clever trickery, crafty-
minded Odysseus! Will you please tell me why
you’re cowering here, standing in place? What is it
you’re waiting for? Knowing you as I do, you two
should be up in the front, leading the way into

battle. For whenever we summon for the feast,
 you two aren't seen standing around, but rushing to
 eat the roast meats, and drink the honey-sweet wine
 to your heart's content. But now you're happy to stand,
 even if you saw ten rows of Achaeans fighting in front,
 facing the cruel bronze."

Scowling, Odysseus πολύμητις answered him :

"Son of Atreus, I have no idea what you're talking about.
 You call us 'cowering'? If you care to see slaughterous war,
 watch every battle we fight. When the Achaeans
 and Trojans meet, the father of Telemachus
 will be fighting in front, facing the foremost Trojans.
 What you say now is as the wind : empty."

King Agamemnon smiled and gladly took back
 his words :

"Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded Odysseus!
 I shall tease you no further; and give you no orders.
 Your heart thinks well of us. And just now, you and I
 share the same mind. So enough! I will atone
 later for anything disagreeable said now;
 but may the gods take it all away with the winds."

So he spoke, and the commander of the army
 moved on, and went to others. He found Tydeus'
 son, the high-spirited Diomedes, standing
 in his sleek chariot, reining his eager horses;
 and Capaneus' son Sthenelus stood beside

him. When Agamemnon saw this he spoke,
upbraiding them with fearsome words :

“Ah, son of Tydeus the war-wise! Why cower
like this, staring from afar into the path to war?
Go! Tydeus surely never cowered like this,
but was ever in front of his friends, destroying
the enemy! I never met him or saw him,
but men say he was beyond all men! Who doesn’t
know the tale of Tydeus and the Cadmeians?
He was a stranger in Mycenae, all alone,
yet challenged every last man there to wrestle,
and beat them all easily. (They say Athena
helped him.) So on his way out of town, fifty youths
(the Cadmeians) lay in wait for him in the reeds
by an overgrown river. And Tydeus killed
them all. One man only he let live, following
signs and omens in the air from the gods.
This was your father, Tydeus of Aetolia.
But we hear what people say. ‘His son’s a lesser
warrior, though he speaks well in assembly.’”

So he spoke, and mighty Diomedes grimaced
with uneasy outrage, and answered not a word.
So Capaneus’ son, noble Sthenelus,
answered him, and said :

“Son of Atreus, why lie when truth comes easier
to you? We say solemnly that we are better
than our fathers. *We* took seven-gated Thebe
(and we *did* take it) with fewer warriors, and

against its mighty wall. We brought to those sinners
destruction. So don't hold us next to our fathers."

Scowling, mighty Diomedes answered him :

"Friend, keep out of it, and hear me : Agamemnon,
our commander, wants to win, and that's the point
and be-all of all of it. If we fail to take Troy,
he will face great grief—and you and I will be dead."

So come then! let us think of battle and obliteration."

So spoke Diomedes. Then, from his chariot,
in full armour, he sprang to the ground; and fearful
was the rattle of the bronze upon his body
as he moved. Even the most defiant of men
well might have quailed at the sound of it.

As when the ever-rushing wave of the sea smashes against
shore in a polychromatic blast, driven by the West Wind :
out in the deep it increases to a crest, then shatters on
land with splashy roar : and all along the land's-edge the water
swells, and butts its head, and spits forth its foamy froth all over
the headlands, dousing the rocks with salt spray : just in this way, one
after another, the Danaans marched in lines of battle
unceasingly over the plain, towards Ilium and its men.
Except for now and then a command shouted by a leader
to his warriors, the entire Achaean army marched
in silence : though one might not believe this of so vast an army :
they were silent, as if without voice, obeying the command
of their leaders : and their shining armour glimmered as they marched

in rows. The Trojans, however—like a multitude of ewes,
 agglomerated and bleating in the yard of a man of wealth,
 incessantly bleating to be milked of their milk, when they hear
 the bleats of their lambs : just so were the polyglot battle-cries
 resounding up and down the broad lines of the Trojan army.
 Their warriors spoke a blended glossolalia of tongues,
 for the Trojan forces consisted of men of different lands.
 These men were motivated by Ἄρης ; and the Achaeans
 by Athena Shining-Eyes : and all warriors together
 by (Δεῖμος) Terror and (φόβος) Panic, and (Ἔρις) Frenzy
 that rages insatiably, a sister and friend of Ἄρης
 man-killer. Revealing her crest only a little at first, she
 rears up her head into the clouds while her feet tread the earth.
 She it was, Ἔρις , goddess of chaos, who now threw awful discord
 into the crush of battle, as she came down into the crowd,
 increasing the groans of men.

At once the two rushing armies

met in a crashing of iron and bronze, their shields
 clashing together with the fury of armoured
 warriors charging far and wide across the plain,
 with long spears raised and bristling one with another,
 with front-lines surging ahead of the dense middle,
 and intermixing; and tumultuous clamour
 filled the air entire. Soon to come were death-groans
 and victory-shouts of the killers and the killed,
 and the earth become red with blood. As when winter-
 swelled rivers, flooded and gushing down mountainsides
 from their rushing springs to a spot where two valleys
 meet, and join their raging floods in the deep ravine,
 and the herdsman on the hillside hears the thunder

of it from far off : even so was the mingled
clamour of shouting and struggle.

First, Antilochus, son of Nestor, struck down to
Hades, with a blow, a Trojan in bronze armour,
an honourable soldier who had charged up to
the front to fight, Echepolus, Thalysius' son.
Antilochus plunged his spear through his bushy-plumed
helmet and on through his forehead, and the spear-point
passed into his brain; and his eyes went blank, and he
collapsed straight down like a shattered tower, amid
surging combat. When he fell, the high-spirited king
Elephenor, leading the Abantes, seized hold
of his feet, he the son of Chalcodon, and sought
to drag him away from under the darkening spray
of spears and stones and arrows flying overhead,
eager to quickly strip off the armour of the dead,
as a trophy to carry away : but his purpose
occupied only little time, as death-dealing
Agenor saw him dragging the corpse, and also
saw how Elephenor had let his shield uncover
his side, as he bent to the body, so he stuck
his spear in between his ribs, loosening his limbs.
So he lost his breath forever, and the surging
armies trampled him into the dirt as Trojans
and Achaeans fought ragefully, springing like wolves
one upon another, man against man.

Then Telamonian Ajax, the tremendous
Ajax, struck down vigorous Simoeisius,
an unmarried youth, Anthemion's son.

Beside the green banks of the river Simois
 his mother had birthed him, as she came down
 from Ida, where she had travelled with her parents
 to see their flocks. For this reason the baby was named
 Simoeisius. He hadn't yet chanced to repay
 the debt of his parents' tender care, and his life
 lasted but a brief moment, for he was conquered
 by the hand of great-hearted Ajax. In the front
 of the battle he was struck through the chest
 by the right nipple; and the death-bringing spear went
 straight through his shoulder and out through his back,
 and his feet gave way, and down he fell to the dust.

Just as a poplar tree, even and tall, but shorn
 of its branches, for the craftsman to bend them
 into wheel-rims for the beautiful chariots,
 lies drying on its side by the river.

Just so did Zeus-born Ajax rob Simoeisius
 of life. And quick-moving Antiphus, Priam's son,
 saw through the crowd, and hurled his sharp spear at Ajax.
 He missed him, but struck Leucus in the groin, a good
 soldier of Odysseus', as he dragged the corpse
 off to his side, away from due burial rites;
 so the dead body fell from his hands, and his own
 corpse fell onto it. Seeing this, Odysseus
 got enraged, and stalked among the turbulent front
 lines of battle, his body sheathed in flashing bronze,
 till he came exceedingly close to the enemy;
 then, glancing all round, his eyes flashing fire,
 he let his shining spear fly : and the Trojan

warriors fell back from his throw : but it was no
 vain effort : he struck Priam's son Democoön,
 who'd come from his father's horse farm at Abydos
 to fight, an ill decision, for Odysseus'
 spear-point of bronze, thrown in anger for the fallen,
 struck him in the side of the head and drove clean through :
 and his eyes went blank, and he dropped to the earth,
 and his armour clattered around him. Meanwhile,
 Hector and the other foremost Trojans fighting
 in front were being beaten back, and the Argives
 shrieked, a terrible sound, and charged onwards,
 pushing the dead aside and advancing on the enemy.

And Apollo of-the-wolves, watching from afar,
 shouted in anger to the Trojan warriors :

"Rouse yourselves, Trojans! Tamers of wild horses!
 Stop this retreat from the fight with the Argives!
 They're not stone and iron but skin and bone like you!
 Their bodies will not resist the sharp-cutting bronze
 when they are struck! And Achilles is not in the fight!
 The son of Thetis wavy-haired sits by his ships,
 brooding over a rage going round in his head!
 Trojans! Forward!"

Thus spoke the fearsome god from the direction of the city.

But the Achaeans had Athena omni-μητις , goddess
 most glorious, motivating them, whenever she saw them
 giving way.

Then Diores, son of Amarynceus, met
 his fate. A jagged stone hit him at the ankle,
 thrown by Peiros, Imbrasmus' son, leader
 of the Thracian warriors, come from Ainos.
 The tendons were torn by the pitiless rock,
 and the bones shattered, and backwards he fell
 in the dust. He raised up his hands to his friends,
 but Peiros ran over and sliced his belly
 open, and his bowels spilled out onto the earth,
 and he lost his breath forever.

As Peiros made to spring back to his lines, Thoas
 of Aetolia impaled him with his spear,
 and the bronze-tip was stuck in his lung : then Thoas
 came close, and yanked the fatal spear out of his chest;
 then drew his sword, and sank its sharp point deep
 in his belly, and robbed him of his life.

Then his Thracian friends, who bound their hair in top-
 knots, leaped in round the body, their deadly spear-points
 reaching far out, and Peiros, who once was mighty
 and brave, now obliged others to drive back Thoas,
 who, surprised, lost his chance of stripping the armour,
 and fell backwards into his lines.

So they lay in the dust one by another :
 there, for the Trojans, Peiros, a leader of the Thracians;
 here, an Achaean, Diores, leader of the Epeians.

And around them dead men were spread all over the plain.
 No longer could one army make light of the other :

not with so many warriors lying face-down in the dust.

End of Book IV

Book V

Athena Contriver endowed Diomedes
with power and courage; so that, possessed with these,
he should move conspicuous among the Argives,
and excite marvellous awe in all who saw him,
and win glory. She worked inside him and blazed out
an inexhaustible fire from his helmet and shield;
as a star coming at harvest, shining brighter
than the rest, rises from Oceanus' waves :
such blazing power he possessed from head to foot;
thus, motivated by Athena war-minded,
he charged into the deepest of the fray.

And appearing ahead of him in the gory
turbulence was a wealthy Trojan called Dares,
an excellent man and priest of Hephaestus;
and his two sons well-knew many fighting methods.
These two separated, then charged divergent at
Diomedes, they in their chariot, and he
rushing on furiously on foot. As they closed
in on him, the younger brother, Phlegaeus,
first let fly his death-bringing spear, but it flew past
the left shoulder of Tydeus' son Diomedes,
and he escaped without a scratch. Then Diomedes
threw, and his hand was sure, and the spear struck the chest
of Phlegaeus between the nipples, and pushed him
backwards off his racing chariot. Then the older brother
leapt off his own very beautiful chariot,
which headed on to Diomedes. This son of Dares
dare not lie fallen beside his brother, knowing

his holy father would be wholly undone by grief.
 But he would not yet escape from Diomedes,
 or the coming of black fate, had not inventive
 god Hephaestus, respecting his patron,
 the priest Dares, obscured his son in the moving
 darkness of the battle riot, and saved his life.

So the high-spirited son of Tydeus, mighty
 Diomedes, took all their horses, and ordered
 his men to lead them back to the fixed ships.

And when the Trojans saw the two sons of Dares,
 one fleeing, the other dead by his chariot,
 all their hearts became crazed with panic.

At that unseemly sight—cowardice—Athena
 Shining-Eyes took the hot hand of irate Ἄρης
 and said to him :

“Ἄρης , Ἄρης , world-destroying Ἄρης !
 Look at you, your garments filthy with blood!
 Come away from Trojan and Achaean. Let’s rest.
 Shall we let them be for now, to fight it out
 on their own? We shall see which army Zeus Father
 hands victory. So you and I slip away
 for now, and stay out of the way of his rage.”

Thus spoke Athena, and led Ἄρης away
 from the fight. They sat down by the flowery banks
 of the river Scamander. There, in comfort,
 they watched the Danaans lean their heavy weight

against the Trojans, and drive them back. Each man cut
 down a leader : first, Agamemnon flung from
 his chariot at the not-so-invincible
 Odus, leader of the Halizones;
 and as he turned to flee, the spear impaled
 itself between his shoulder blades, and its gory
 spear-tip burst out through his chest. And he fell to earth,
 and his armour clattered around him.

And Idomeneus, flashing there, now here, like
 a nightmare reared on Phaestus and cut him down,
 the son of Borus the Maeonian. He'd come
 from the fertile fields of Tarne, a quiet Lydian town.
 Hoping to flee, Phaestus had one foot in his chariot
 when the long night-bringing spear in Idomeneus' grip
 pierced through his right shoulder : so he tumbled off
 his chariot into depthless death.

Idomeneus' personal attendants
 then stole away his armour.

Now, Strophius' son Scamandrius, well-skilled
 in the hunt, for forest-goddess Artemis
 herself had taught him the arts of killing
 all things raised in wild mountain forests,
 of how to pursue his prey, and subdue it,
 whatever its size : now, arrow-showering
 Artemis ignored him, and no aid at all was
 his long-experienced excellence in archery :
 for the death-bringing spear in the hands of the son
 of Atreus, Menelaus, struck him in the back

as he ran for his life, and the bloody bronze burst
through his chest. He coughed out blood as he fell
face-down, and his armour clattered around him.

Meriones killed Phereclus, son of Tecton,
Harmon's son. When he died, three generations
of mastery in art died with him. His hands once
knew all manner of intricate craftsmanship, for
Athena Seer had loved him very much. He
it was who had built for Alexandros the well-
balanced sea-ships that began all the trouble
for the Trojans, and for himself, all because
he had no knowledge of the signs of the gods.
Meriones chased him down and stuck his spear-point
up through his ass and clean into his bladder
through bone : so he dropped to his knees with rageful cry,
and death took him away.

And Pedaeus, Antenor's son, fell before Meges.
Though born illegitimate, he was raised by δῖος
Theano lovingly, and equally with her
own children, to make her husband happy.
But Phyleus' son Meges brought his spear
like a rush of fire sharply into the bone
at the nape of his neck; and pushed through his mouth,
ripping his tongue away : so with the cold bronze stuck
in his teeth he dropped to the dust.

And Euaemon's son Eurypylus killed δῖος
Hypsenor, son of kind-spirited Dolophin,
whom the people had ordained as priest of river-

god Scamander, and was honoured by all as a
god. But Eurypylus caught up with Hypsenor,
and sliced his muscular arm off at the shoulder;
and it dropped bloody at his feet; and death took him
forever.

So the two mighty armies struggled in combat :
a confused havoc in dust : and the earth trembled
under their feet, rattling the armour of the freshly dead.
And Diomedes couldn't have said which of the two
he moved among, so interwoven were the lines
of Trojan and Achaean, as he charged like a
raging winter river overswelling with storm-rain
and spilling over its banks, no longer confined
as it rushes unrestrained over cultivated
field and vineyard and threshing floor,
Zeus' heavy rain bringing to ruin
many sophisticated works of man :
even so was the thick confusion of Trojan
battle-lines collapsing in wild retreat :
and though they were many, no one dared face him head-on.

But from afar, Trojan Pandaros observed him
darting across the plain like a shooting star, driving
his enemy back into confusion and rout.
Pandaros drew his bow to full stretch and let fly,
and hit his mark, somewhat : Diomedes was struck
on the right shoulder, and the arrow tore through
his breast-plate and kept going : and Diomedes
looked down to see blood spoiling his armour.

And illustrious Pandaros, son of Lycaon,
seeing the result, shouted aloud :

“Forward, Trojans! You breakers of horses! The best
of the Achaeans is hit! Surely he’s breathing his last!
—If truly Apollo led me here when I left Lykia!”

This he boasted loudly : but his arrow did not
subdue Diomedes, who fell back to his horses
and chariot. There, he spoke to good Sthenelus :

“Hey, friend, come down here and pull this goddamn arrow out of me.”

So he spoke. Sthenelus jumped down from the chariot,
came up behind Diomedes and saw the arrow
sticking out his shoulder, with its bloody barbed point.
With one quick tug he yanked the arrow out, then came
around to face Diomedes, who tore off his
breast-plate to see his blood leaking down his tunic.

And Diomedes prayed in a whisper :

*“Hear me, Zeus Daughter—Unwearied—Invincible!
If ever you stood kindly by my father in hateful battle
stand now by me! Athena! Allow me to kill
that man. Let him feel the force of my spear-point,
he who struck from afar and boasted over me,
and thought I was done with the bright light of the sun.”*

So he prayed, and Athena goddess heard, and rose
from the river. She came near to him, and relaxed

his limbs, and removed all thought of pain from his mind;
and in his ear she whispered :

“Forward, Diomedes!” she said. “The Trojans await your hand,
and the sword in it. And in your heart the spirit
of your father Tydeus, strong shield-bearing charioteer,
grows ever stronger, for I am with you, and will never leave.

I have lifted the mist from your eyes, Diomedes, so now,
for the first time, you may perceive both man *and* god.

So, if a god comes here to test you, do not fight face to face
with any Immortal—except Aphrodite. If *she* comes
into the fight, cut her with your sharp sword.”

So spoke Athena Shining-Eyes, and backed away.

And Diomedes son of Tydeus once more
immersed himself in battle, eager as before,
and moved on under the susperation of spears
to the foremost fighters at the front-lines. His heart
was already in the fight, but now three times more
eager to face Trojans : Death gave Diomedes
a reason to live.

Just as a lion a shepherd
has wounded to protect his woolly sheep
as it sprang over a fence into the pasture,
stands bloody, but alive : his anger roused,
the lion stalks the earth, and savages the panicked
sheep that see no escape : then, leaving them lying

dead, the lion of fury leaps over the fence
and away : just so did furious Diomedes
heap up Trojan dead.

He killed Astynous, and Hypeiron, leader
of men; the one with a spear-point stuck in his throat,
and for the other he drew his sword and shaved off
his shoulder, straight through the clavicle, and it slid
away from his neck and back and dropped to his feet.

He left them as they were and went after Abas
and Polyidus, sons of ancient Eurydamas,
seer and reader of dreams. The old man, however,
had not seen Diomedes coming : and their lives
were taken away. Then he went after Xanthus
and Thoön, the two cherished sons of Phaenops,
for the man was worn down with age, and they alone
were left to inherit his life's wealth. But Diomedes
killed them, and left for the father a bitter sorrow,
for his sons never came back from war to receive
his embrace : and when he died, the people
divided up his wealth among themselves.

Diomedes then saw two of King Priam's sons
rolling along in one chariot, Echemmon
and Chromius. He sprang on them, as a lion
catches an ox by the neck when it feeds
in a thicket, and the heavy ox, writhing
in its jaws, breaks its own neck : just so, they
struggled vainly with Tydeus' son,
who tossed one then the other off the chariot.

Then he stripped off their armour, and gave the horses
to his men, who drove them back to the ships.

Now when the leader of the Trojans, Aeneas,
witnessed Diomedes' path of destruction
through whole rows of warriors, he went through the havoc
under the whistling rain of spears, in search of
godly Pandaros, the Trojan army's finest sniper.
When he found him, Aeneas went to Pandaros
son of Lycaon, and spoke :

"Pandaros, why aren't you shooting your far-reaching
arrows? Your famous bow is too heavy to lift?
You're the best archer we have, and you've left behind
no better in Lykia. So come! Raise your hands
to heaven and send an arrow to that man there,
whoever he is, who's moving like a madman!
He's making much evil work of our warriors,
killing them left and right—many fine warriors.
Unless he's a god angry with us for whatever
reason. What do you think?—improper sacrifices?
Just how crushing can god's rage get?"

And Pandaros answered him :

"Aeneas, that son of a bitch is the son of Tydeus,
Diomedes. I recognize him by his shield,
and coloured helmet-hair, and by those tremendous
horses of his. I can't say to a certainty
that he's not a god, but if he's the simple man
I say he is, the son of war-wise Tydeus,

he's not running riot without the assistance
of some god at least. Some Immortal goes with him,
but we men can't see. Just as my arrow hit him
the god knocked it aside.

Yes, I let fly at him
already, and I hit him through that glittery plate
they wear. I thought I'd killed him, but my arrow
only hit his right shoulder. I didn't kill him.
Maybe god's raging at me for something.

And though you call me the best archer we have,
I've yet to be given a chariot to use!
When I left my father's halls we had eleven
chariots, all first-rate, just sitting there under
cover, each with its horse beside it, feeding on
the barley and rye. Over and over again
my father told me to take one of the well-built
chariots with me, so I might rush into harsh
combat like some wild thing—or even lead
the Trojans into battle.

But I didn't listen.
I said to myself, 'How will I find enough food
for my horses amid the crowd of the army?'
They've always been used to eating their fill, you see.

So I left them behind with my chariot—bad idea—
and came on foot, trusting completely
in my bow, which was destined to bring me no help.

Already I've hit two of their best leaders well
 enough to draw blood, yet they're still walking around,
 Menelaus and Diomedes, angrier at us now.

Why did I take this bastard bow from its peg,
 the day I left for charming Ilium, to help
 Hector!

If I get back home to my wife and house
 (a palace, actually, a colossal high-roofed palace)—
 when I see my homeland, some stranger man will
 no doubt cut my head clean off when I step foot there—
 that's how much luck this bow has given me!"

And Aeneas leader of the Trojans answered him :

"Tell me no more. Nothing will be otherwise
 until we face this man Diomedes.
 Come onto my chariot and see Troy's horses
 run. Watch them flee before us over the plain.
 If god grants victory to Diomedes,
 the others will bring us back into the city.
 Come on, take the whip and the reins, and I'll
 step down, in order to fight. Or you stay here,
 and I'll take care of the horses."

And the glorious son of Lycaon answered him :

"Aeneas, you hold the reins and drive the horses.
 If we have to leave Tydeus' son in a hurry,
 it's better if your horses hear their expected

driver's voice, and run, then hear mine, and stand there,
 leaving us for Diomedes to cut us down,
 and take the horses away. You drive the chariot,
 and I'll await Diomedes with my spear-point."

Thus spoke sniper Pandaros. So the two of them
 stepped up into the ornamented chariot
 and roused the horses, in haste to find Diomedes.

So then the war-wise Sthenelus saw them coming,
 and turned to Diomedes to say :

"Son of Tydeus, my good friend, there are two men
 coming, and they look forceful about it. I know
 them. They're no small warriors. I'd put their strength at—
 immeasurable? It's the master archer Pandaros,
 the one who says he's the son of Lycaon.
 Next to him is Aeneas, son of royal Anchises.
 It's said his mother is Aphrodite. Should we
 harass a god's child, or get the hell out of here
 for now—away from the front lines is all I mean,
 until proper reinforcements? Have you not spilled
 enough blood yet? We might get killed right around here."

Then through clenched teeth Diomedes spoke :

"Don't tell me that word 'retreat'. You will not persuade
 me. It's not in me to slink away or cower :
 my fury is unending. And I don't need a car
 like theirs to meet them. I will face them as I am,
 afraid of no man. This Athena has taught me.

Look at their horses : they won't be bringing two men back with them, I promise you that. Now listen to this and keep it in mind. If you wish to fight and ride, tie the reins tight to the rim-handle beforehand, but I'd rather you not. While I'm killing them both, you get those horses of theirs loose. Take them away from here and keep them safe. Those horses are as rare as Aeneas. Zeus gave them to Troy—something to do with Ganymede—and it's said these are the finest horses that ride in the Dawn and the Sun. Ancient king Laomedon handed them to Priam, but before that, sneaky Anchises got his own hand in there, put his own mares to them, and stole the blood-line. And Laomedon never heard a word of it when six foals were born at Anchises' palace. He kept four in his stables for himself, and gave the other two, which I think we're now seeing, to Aeneas, who presently raises the battle-cry. If we get those godly horses we'll win some fine praise."

Thus in this way they spoke to one another while the Trojans closed in on them through the rising dust, driving their magnificent horses.

And Pandaros was the first of all of them to speak, shouting :

"Strong-hearted battle-wise noble Diomedes!
My sure arrow didn't kill you, my goddamn arrow!
So now I shall hit the mark with my spear!"

As he spoke he raised his spear and let fly.
 As the spear raced in, Diomedes raised his shield,
 but the spear-point burst through, and the sharp tip touched his
 belly : then stopped cold : his heavy shield had caught it.

And illustrious Pandaros, son of Lycaon,
 seeing the result, shouted aloud :

“Right through the belly! You can’t stay on your feet now!
 Thank you for the glory I shall surely receive!”

And Diomedes answered him coldly :

“You missed me,” he said. “Now I shall not stop until
 one or another or both of you are dead.”

As he spoke, with Ἄρης and Athena watching,
 Diomedes let fly : and his spear arced up in
 to the sky, and as it fell Athena nudged it
 straight, and it drove through his nose, tearing out his tongue
 and shattering his white teeth as the stubborn spear-
 point flew down and out through the bottom of his chin.
 Backwards he fell off his speeding chariot, and
 dropped, with a crash and a clatter, into the dust.
 And the swift-footed thunderous horses shied from
 Diomedes, and ran on and away : and there
 Pandaros died.

And Aeneas jumped from the chariot with shield
 and long spear, intent to guard the mutilated
 corpse from being dragged away by the Achaeans.

He bestrode the body, standing there like a proud lion breathing fury, with his thick shield held up in front of him and his spear in his hand, eager to kill anybody coming close : and he let out a fearful cry. Diomedes, meanwhile, bent down, and with two hands lifted up a heavy stone, one too large for two men to bear upright for long, but which he lifted lightly from the earth. With this he crushed Aeneas' bones at the waist, where the hip-bone sockets the leg-bone, what people call 'the cup' : Diomedes destroyed all this; and the stone tore away sinew and skin. Then the Trojan hero dropped to his knees, gushing jets of blood, and came to lean upon the earth : and his eyes went blank.

Right there, king of men Aeneas would have died, but Aphrodite saw, his mother who lay with Anchises in the pasture-land. She spread out her arms and let her loose garment the colour of shining sunlight come down onto Aeneas, concealing him from spears and arrows and the Danaans with their horses.

Thus the goddess lifted her son up out of the fight.

Sthenelus, meanwhile, followed his orders, given him by Diomedes. His first task was to keep his own horses safe : so he steered his chariot away from battle, stepped down, and sent his horses racing back into the Achaean lines. Then he rushed at Aeneas' horses; up close they were unearthly beauties; and he drove the pair of them

into the glittering Achaean army and
 handed them over to Deïpylus, the best
 of all of his friends from youth, for they shared the same
 outlook on things : and good Deïpylus took them
 away to the ships.

Then Sthenelus jumped back up
 into his chariot, took the reins, and drove his
 horses headlong into the confused battle, in
 search of Diomedes.

He, meanwhile, was after Cypris,
 stalking the goddess with his sharp heartless bronze spear.
 He knew she was weak, and not a god for the fight :
 no Athena, no Enyo, destroyer of cities.

He pursued her through the swelling fight, flashing here,
 now there, but he kept her in sight, and caught up to her,
 and stabbed at her with his spear-point, slicing open
 a wound along her wrist; and the parting in her
 soft body let out an ambrosial gush : and she
 cried out : and her son fell from her arms :

but Apollo was there to catch him, and remove
 him from the spears and arrows and the Danaans with their horses.

And mighty Diomedes, seeing the result,
 shouted loudly over her :

“Daughter of Zeus, keep out of war! It’s not enough
 you fool weak women? If you come among us I

think you'll shudder even if you hear us from afar."

Thus spoke Diomedes. And Aphrodite, while
he coldly watched her, slithered out from under him,
dismayed and in pain, and went away unsteadily.

Iris Wind-Walker swooped in to lead Cypris away
from the tumultuous battle; and saw the misery
in her face, and the gushing damage to her body;
and took her to Ἄρης at the flowery banks
of the river Scamander. There, furious Ἄρης
watched from the left end of the battle lines,
and any man looking at him would have seen
nothing more than a cloud : not him, nor his spear,
nor his two powerful horses standing alert
in harness and headdress of gold.

So Aphrodite dropped to her knees before
man-slaughtering Ἄρης War God, and spoke :

"Dear brother, help me! Give me your horses
so I can get home, back to Olympus.
A man hurt me, a mortal man cut me open.
He who would now fight Zeus Father himself!"

So she spoke. And Ἄρης nodded, and gave her
his horses. So, the heart-sick Aphrodite stepped
up into the chariot, and Iris came up
beside her and took hold of the reins, then snapped
the whip at the two horses, which eagerly flew
forward. Straightaway they came to the space

of the gods, high Olympus. There, wind-swift Iris
brought the chariot to a halt; then she unbound
the horses and flung ambrosial food before them.

But δῖος Aphrodite sank to the knees of
her mother Dione. Visionary priestess
Dione, goddess older than Hera :
she took her daughter in her arms, and caressed her,
and called her by her name, and said :

“Which of the sky’s children has done this to you?
Treated you so carelessly? As if you work evil
in sight of all.”

And Aphrodite, she-of-the-many-smiles,
answered her :

“Unbearable Diomedes, they call him Tydeus’ son,
hit me, as I went to lift my dead son Aeneas away
from battle, who was to me the best of all men.

That horrible war is more now than Trojan and Achaean!
The Danaans are now fighting Immortals!”

δῖος goddess Dione answered her :

“Stay strong and stand tall, child, in face of all your cares.
Many a time has earth brought sorrow to Olympus.
Ἄρης , I remember, held out against two horrible things :
Otos and his eternal fury of unrestrained desire,
and Ephialtes, nightmare-demon that stole one’s breath away :

the sons of Aloeus. That very name makes me shiver.
 His sons bound Ἴαρκος in chains and locked him in a
 bronze jar for thirteen moons. Ἴαρκος, insatiable
 for war, came close to death, caught in their chains and jar;
 but the stepmother of those sons,—a beautiful
 woman who birthed nasty sons—Eëriboea,
 brought news to Hermes. And nothing gets past trickster
 Hermes, who stole Ἴαρκος away, but still was caught
 in the painful chains that contained him, and almost ended him.
 But he stayed strong.”

And Dione caressed her daughter’s hair, and told her
 other stories : of Hera and the three-barbed arrow
 Heracles shot, which brought her great pain, but she stayed
 strong; and the time that Hades himself required
 medicine, when an arrow tore through his shoulder
 amid the dead : but he, too, stayed strong : and Paean
 healed him with his pain-killing herbs.

And still Dione caressed her daughter’s hair, and continued
 to speak, and said :

“And now Athena has put that horrible man onto you.
 He’s an imbecile if he thinks he’ll fight for long against us
 and then get to one day hear his little ones prattle ‘papa’
 at his knees, when he returns from his ‘mighty combat’.”

Thus spoke Dione soothingly, and continued, saying :

“I should say unbearable Diomedes, however mighty
 of men, should fear that a woman, Aigialeia, his wife,

will wake everyone in her house with her weeping and wailing.

The daughter of Adrastus will be weeping for her husband,
the 'best of the Achaeans', the noble wife of horse-stealing
Diomedes."

And as she continued to speak, she wiped clean her daughter's arm
and hand and wrist, and all the awful pain was healed.

Goddesses Athena and Hera, meanwhile, saw
laughter-loving Aphrodite weeping and sulking,
and took advantage of the moment. They challenged
Zeus of-the-Lightning with bitchy taunting words.
It was Athena Bright-Eyes who first spoke :

"Father," she said, "our Cypris must've been driving
the Achaean ladies to lie with the Trojans,
those dumb bags of guts she loves so passionately.
I think while she was stroking the hand of one
of the beautifully-robed Achaean women,
she tore her wrist open on that lady's golden brooch.

But father, I don't wish to say anything to anger you."

Thus spoke Athena. Then the father of all things
smiled, and summoned Aphrodite to his side.

"You are no warrior, my child," he said. "No!
You encourage charming marriages, and gentle
wedding nights. You do that. And leave this business
to Ἀρης and Athena."

Thus, in this way, the gods spoke : with Aphrodite's head lowered, and Athena and Ἄρης smiling.

While Diomedes indomitable rushed at Apollo :
 he saw in the gods' arms the destroyed body of Aeneas, and wanted the strip off the armour,
 to persist in his offensive on the Trojans,
 so he charged ahead, seeing nothing fearsome in Apollo, and Diomedes felt no fear as
 he rushed at the god, who raised up his heavy shield and took the hammering of Diomedes' sword.
 Apollo then swung at Diomedes, whose own shield caught the blow. One blow, then another, Diomedes wreaked on Apollo's shield, so bright as to be blinding, furious to kill him : but the god held him off.

So Diomedes fell back; then with a fearsome cry he ran on hard at Apollo, who held a hand up, and shouted at him with the voice of heaven :

"Think again, son of Tydeus. Withdraw. We're done. You are neither superior to the gods nor equal, and you will never be otherwise, and neither will we. You are only a man who walks on dust."

Thus spoke Apollo. And the son of Tydeus stepped back: just one or two steps, but still a retreat, opening up ground between them : contemplating the fury he'd heard in the voice of god Apollo, shooter from afar. And so he watched Apollo leave, with the body hanging feeble in his arms.

Apollo carried the body of Aeneas,
 fallen soldier, away from the havoc of noise
 and death. Aeneas was brought up into the city,
 into Troy, where a temple issuing shining light,
 temple sacred to Apollo, stood open for all the people.

The body was brought into the innermost part
 of the temple : the private sanctuary of gods,
 its walls and columns veiled with ornaments both
 splendid and obscure. There, the mother of Apollo,
 elegant Leto, and sister, arrow-sending
 Artemis, seamed his bones together, and restored
 his heartbeat. Then, they buckled his shield around him,
 and rebuilt his armour. And then he opened his eyes.

And Apollo said to Ἄρης :

“ Ἄρης ! Ἄρης ! Man-destroying, blood-stained, murderous stormer
 of cities! Go find that man, the son of Tydeus, he who
 would now fight Zeus Father himself, and take him out of the fight.
 He wounded Cypris, and charged at me, thinking himself a god.”

Apollo said this, then sat atop the lofty wall round Troy,
 to watch.

And furious Ἄρης , cruel and destructive, flew through the ranks
 of Trojan warriors, stimulating combat in the hearts
 of the men. So the leader of the Thracians,
 Acamas the fast-footed, addressed Priam's sons,
 and said :

“Sons of King Priam, beloved of Zeus!

How much longer must we allow this slaughter

to continue? Until the Achaeans are at

the gate? Do you wish to fight them there?

They have cut down Aeneas, whom we thought

equal in honour to Hector δῖος ! ”

Such words he spoke inspired the courage and hearts of all the men.

And moreover Sarpedon upbraided Hector δῖος :

“Hector, where has all your strength gone? If I recall,

you said you’d hold the city simply with your brothers

and sisters’ husbands! You had no need of army

or ally! So where are these brothers and husbands?

I see here with us not one of those you spoke of!

They cower like dogs before a lion! Look round

the front and see who’s fighting for you. *We* are, your

allies—and nothing more than that. I’m from Lycia,

far distant Lycia, where the river Xanthus runs,

where I left my wife and little son, and everything

I own, defenceless against whoever wishes

to take it! While I fight here, encouraging

the Lycians warriors to fight. And I, too,

fight the Achaeans before me—though I’m protecting

nothing of my own here to be captured or stolen

away. So enough of standing here, preparing

ourselves to turn into spoil for prey to feed on!

Tell your men to get strong and defend their wives

and city, and do it now! Or your Troy will be

flattened to dust. Hector! You must rouse the allies,
 who've come from afar, to be strong, and do it now!
 That is your responsibility, night and day!
 You must put away your silence, now, and speak out!
 Then we will put away our strong disapproval."

Thus spoke Sarpedon, and his words stung Hector's heart.
 Straightaway he dropped down from his chariot, his
 plate rattling around him; and with spear in each fist
 he marched hotly back and forth along the Trojan
 lines, shouting at his warriors, encouraging
 them to fight and make the awful noise of combat.

So the Trojan army rallied round, and turned
 to face the enemy : and the Argives observed
 their onslaught, but did not retreat.

Thus the two armies closed in for a second time,
 twin immensities of foot-forces and chariots
 inundating the Scamandrian plain, and all
 the air was veiled in dust, and everyone there
 was lost in the concealing night rising from the
 earth. Each warrior advanced, yet could not see
 the man ahead of him, so thick the dust-fog had
 become, as furious Ἄρης rushed over the field
 of battle, continuing to rouse the Trojan spirit.

And, drawing his golden sword, Apollo flew to
 the Trojan side, when he saw his sister Athena
 Bright-Eyes depart for the oncoming Achaeans.

A marching line of Trojan spearmen, meanwhile,
made way for one more, Aeneas. All the Trojans
beside him smiled when they saw him alive and
powerful, and armed with courage. But no man spoke,
for the lines were closing on "Ἀρης' man-destroying frenzy.

Even as the winnowing wind sifts the granary floor,
when Demeter Earth-Mother separates the grain
out, leaving the chaff-heaps growing ever-whiter :

just so, the dust-cloud rising up from the striking
heavy hooves of horses turned the armies ever-
whiter, as the dark swirling dust rose to heaven.

Then Athena waved away the mist, and the two
armies saw each other : each a force of round shields
and bristling spears.

Back on the Achaean side, the two Ajaxes
and Odysseus and Diomedes rallied
the Danaans to fight : but each warrior needed
no further encouragement. Each felt no fear
or misdoubt, but held full possession of their strength
facing the oncoming Trojan army, and stood
their ground in heart, just as Zeus' dark clouds colour
over high-reaching mountain peaks when the air is
dead-still, when the agitation of the North Wind
sleeps, along with all the other violent winds that blow
with howling noise, and scatter everything to and fro :
even so the Danaans stood their ground against
the oncoming Trojans, and did not flee.

And the son of Atreus Agamemnon strode along the lines,
barking many commands :

“O friends!” he shouted. “Be men! Be brave in your heart!
Or feel shame in the eyes of the men around you
in combat! More men noble at heart live on than
are killed! But cowards die one and all, and nothing
remains of them! So be men! Be brave in your heart!”

Agamemnon shouted this out with brandished spear,
then let fly ragefully, and impacted the shield
of a friend to transcendent Aeneas : the son
of Pergasus, Deïcoön. Him the Trojans honoured
equivalent to the many sons of Priam
because he fought at the front, always there to vex
the foremost Achaeans. Him Agamemnon transfixed
with his spear, which penetrated his shield and stuck
his abdomen. The sharp bronze point ripped his stomach
apart : so he fell to earth, and his armour clattered
around him.

Then Trojan Aeneas took down two excellent Danaans,
Crethon and Orsilochus, the sons of Diocles, who lived
in spacious Pheme, a man of great wealth, whose race
sprang from Alpheius, the broad river that rushes
through the Pylian land; and king of men Orsilochus
and brother Crethon were fighters skilled in many
combat arts. In their prime strength of youth they sailed
the black ships of Messenia to Ilium,
land of grazing horses, following the Argive

fleet, to answer the injured honour of the sons
 of Atreus, Menelaus and Agamemnon.
 But there they reached completion, and went down to death.

Just as two lions raised on mountain peaks in deep
 woodland, together leave their mother and come down
 into the farmyards of men, and savage cattle
 and goodly sheep : so Aeneas carved them to pieces
 so you couldn't tell which was which any longer,
 and these lay under the tramping feet of war, forgotten there.

Menelaus saw, incensed almost to madness,
 and cut a passage through the warriors struggling
 at the front to get himself close to Aeneas;
 and Ἄρης kept raising his fury ever-greater,
 so that he might fall before the hand of Aeneas.

And Antilochus son of Nestor saw the mighty
 stride of Menelaus, and wildly pushed his way
 through the raging front-lines to get to him, for he
 feared this leader of men might be hard done-to, and
 all their work would in his one last breath go awry.

He saw the two enemies facing off, Aeneas
 and Menelaus, their spear-tips catching the sun,
 ready to clash : and Antilochus came up beside
 his commander-general, and took his stand. And
 Aeneas, mighty warrior, raised his spear, then
 stopped. When he saw the two of them set together
 against him, Aeneas withdrew into the tumult,
 and was gone.

So Menelaus and Antilochus took out
their anger on the Trojans fighting at the front.

They cut down Pylaemenes, the great leader
of the heavily-shielded Paphlagonians.
Menelaus leapt up onto the back of his
galloping chariot, and punctured his neck
with his sword; while Antilochus pitched a stone
directly at his charioteer, the unhappy
Mydon, just as he was bringing the horses round,
to flee, but Antilochus did not miss. He struck
Mydon dead-centre in the elbow; and the reins,
ornamented with inlaid ivory, fell from
his hands, and skimmed loose along the dust. As Mydon
looked up from his hands, Antilochus sprang onto him
and ran his sword full in the face. Mydon, gasping
out his life, tumbled back out of the chariot,
but his bent knees hooked over the rim, and trapped him
there hanging, with head and shoulders scraping along
the dust, until some horses kicked his body away,
and he fell to earth with a clatter. Meanwhile,
Antilochus turned the chariot round again,
lashed the horses, and sent them off into the Achaean lines.

But Hector kept watch on the men, and came screaming
through the ranks, rushing at them, with many Trojan
warriors following : and over all Ἄρης
and Enyo brought uproar and confusion, and pitiless battle-death;
War-Loving Enyo, shameless accumulator of corpses,
sister and lover of Ἄρης . And Ἄρης raised a colossal

sword, and fury and frenzy filled everyone in front of Hector,
and everyone behind him.

Diomedes saw all this coming at him with-
out fear. As a man crosses a limitless plain
only to stop at a fast-flowing river with-
out resource to cross it, which flows on roaring in
dashing course down to the salt sea, and seeing it
roaring and boiling, steps back, and turns back,
so Diomedes now turned, and spoke to his warriors :

“Warriors! Look, and marvel at mighty Hector δῖος !
A daring spearman, and dangerous fighter!
Wrongly we judged the Trojan army to be weak!
I see Ἄρης in human form standing by him,
defending him from death! Keep your faces pointed
to the Trojans, but retreat! Do not fight the gods!”

But by the time he finished speaking, the Trojans
were upon them, and Hector cut down two mighty fighters
riding in one chariot, Menesthes and Anchialus.

And Telamonian Ajax saw the two men
die, and when they fell to the ground, he swelled
with woe and rage, and came close to the enemy
and hurled his shining spear, and struck Amphius,
son of Selagus, who lived in Apaesos, a wealthy man
with ownership of many cornfields, but ill-fate
inspired his contribution to Priam and his sons.
His son felt a death-bringing spear insert itself
in his abdomen, and he fell to earth. Ajax

rushed up to tear off his armour, and the Trojans
 showered him with spears : a gleaming, deathly bronze rain :
 but his shield trapped many of them. Then he set his foot
 on the corpse, and yanked out the gory spear, then began
 tearing off the ornamented armour, but spears
 kept flying in from the Trojans, so he gave that up,
 and flung the dead body aside. He contemplated
 the new-hatched strength of the Trojans, and all the spears
 and arrows and stones coming at him, as they fiercely
 protected their fallen warrior. So, though he
 was massive in size and strength, even wondrous to see,
 he withdrew, holding his sword up before him as protection.

So the many warriors struggled in grisly combat.

And fate led Tlepolemus of Rhodes, son of Heracles,
 a noble warrior massive in physique, to face godlike
 Sarpedon, coming forward from the Trojans. When they came close,
 one the son, the other the grandson of Zeus Cloud-Gatherer,
 Tlepolemus, notorious murderer of family, spoke first :

“I know you—Sarpedon from Lycia. A ‘giver of counsel’.
 Is it crucial *you* come cowering here, ignorant of fight?
 They lie, all who call you son of Zeus. I see in you nothing
 of his warrior bloodline, only weakness and cowardice.
 Another sort of man they say was Heracles, my father.

Your mighty Troy fell once before, under his hand. Heracles,
 answering your people’s idiocy, came like a lion
 armed with single-minded fury and desolated your streets.
 Don’t you know of the daughter of Laomedon and the ‘famed

horses of Troy'? Heracles came here with six ships and few men,
and that was all he needed.

But you're a nothing, and your people are falling around you.
You shall be no help to your friends from Lycia, nor to Troy.
I come now to kill you."

And Sarpedon leader of the Lycians answered him :

"Hear *me* now, noble Tlepolemus!"

So Tlepolemus waited, and Sarpedon continued :

"Your glorious father Heracles," he said, "destroyed holy
Ilium in answer to thoughtless, noble Laomedon,
who refused to honour his service, by withholding the mares
he had promised him, and for which your father had come from far.

Sound accurate to you? How about this? I shall slaughter you
with these hands. My spear will take your life and drop it in Hades.
There you can frolic through death with *his* magnificent horses."

So spoke Sarpedon, and Tlepolemus raised his ashen spear,
and the two spears flew from their hands at once. Sarpedon struck him
in the middle of the throat with his nightmare spear-point, and his
eyes went blank. And Tlepolemus' spear struck Sarpedon
on the left thigh, tore through eagerly and grated against bone;
but his father just now defended his son from destruction.

Then his Trojan friends rushed in and carried godlike Sarpedon
off the field of battle in such haste that they failed to first

draw out the long spear of ashwood sticking in his thigh, so that he might stand on his own two feet : and the pain he felt was great.

The mangled body of Tlepolemus, meanwhile, was dragged into the bronze-armoured Achaean lines. And Odysseus saw the dead body, and quivered with fury, but yet held back, wondering if rushing headlong after Sarpedon the son of Zeus Loud-Thunderer was best to do, or if he should just bring down a number of simple Lycians instead. But fate would not have Odysseus pursue Zeus' son with the sharp edge of his sword; so Athena Protectress turned his mind to bringing down a number of simple Lycians instead. Odysseus, therefore, took out Coeranus τε Alastor τε Chromius τε Alcandrus τε Halius τε Noëmon τε Prytanis. ὅς οἱ Odysseus would have killed more Lycians, but he was seen by fearsome Hector, his helmet glinting in the fray. Hector strode forcefully along the warriors at the front, his whole body glinting, and the Danaans he passed shivered with terror in his fiery presence, as he stalked Odysseus πολύμητις .

But, just then, the wounded Sarpedon, son of Zeus, put himself in Hector's path, and spoke out plaintively :

"Son of Priam, don't leave me here as food for birds! Please carry me away! As it is, I'd rather leave my life within your walls. It may well be that I shall never see my wife and son again. I've had all the pleasure of them I shall ever have."

But before Sarpedon was finished speaking, Hector was gone. Having given no answer, he rushed on eagerly, pushing

his own warriors aside to get to the Argives and take their lives, as many as humanly possible.

As for the godlike Sarpedon, his friends from Lycia took him beneath a magnificent oak tree, away from the fight. He sat down among the acorns, under the oakwood sacred to Zeus; and friend and fellow warrior Pelagon pulled out the ashen spear from his thigh. Then dark blood gushed out; and his life began rushing out with it; and a darkness began to cloud his eyes.

But then he took a breath : he breathed in, and then his life became trapped in his body again, and the lightly blowing North Wind ran freshly upon him, reviving him, and brought him back from light-headedness : and Sarpedon survived.

And the Argives, facing Ἄρης and heavily-armed Hector, neither gave ground and retreated to their black ships, but neither did they gain ground. They realised that Ἄρης now favoured the Trojans.

Who were the men now killed by Hector and furious Ἄρης ?

First, there was the excellent Teuthras; then, the charioteer Orestes; and then Trechus, warrior from Aetolia; and then Oenomaus; and then Helenus son of Oenops; and then Oresbius with sparkling belt-plate, he who lived in Hyle amid great wealth and its responsibilities on a fine estate than ran down to the Cephisian lake; and along that water's edge lived other wealthy Boeotians in a land wondrously rich and fertile.

Now high on Olympus, the Woman Above, Queen of Heaven,
 the beautiful Hera, watched impatiently as the Argives
 fell in such excessive numbers in battle without repulse;
 so she turned to goddess Athena, and spoke with heated words :

“ὦ πόποι ! ” she said. “Athena Unwearied, child of Zeus!
 Our promise to Menelaus will embarrass all of us!
 We promised he would tear down the walls and utterly erase
 Ilium from the earth, then sail home satisfied! We can’t
 allow destructive Ἄρης to keep directing the frenzy
 of battle in this way! Come! We must enter into the fight!”

Thus Hera, Woman Above; and Athena heard, and obeyed.

First, Hera, daughter of titanic Cronos, castrating God
 of Time, set about preparing her chariot, harnessing
 her horses in an exquisite ornamentation of gold :
 and Hebe fitted a pair of eight-spoked wheels to the axle-
 tree of iron under the frame; and their sparkling golden rims,
 and tires of bronze, were indestructible, wondrous to see.
 Each wheel-hub, where the spokes radiated from, were of silver,
 and when the wheels went round all shone blindingly. The frame itself
 glimmered with silver and gold, and the chariot-board
 for riders consisted of interwoven springy leather straps.
 A top-rail finished the rim of the curved frame all round.
 Completing the chariot was a silver pole pointing forward;
 at its end was the golden yoke, where the queen attached the straps
 of gold around the necks and breasts of her marvellous horses.
 Thus, then, was Hera eager for discord and the battle-cry.

And Athena Defender let her soft, clinging robe slip down

to the floor, an embroidery of astonishing colours,
 her own hand-work, and stepped away from it. She put on instead
 the armour of Zeus Cloud-Gatherer, readying for awful
 war. She buckled her shield round her shoulders, the famous αἰγίς ,
 a tremendous shining round bristling with a hundred golden-
 threaded tassels, a substantial defender terrifying
 to contemplate. Embossed upon it were emblems of φόβος—
 panic flight; of Ἔρις—hideous violence; of Ἀλκή—
 pitiless courage; of Ἰώκη—the onslaught that freezes
 the blood; and, amid it all, the Gorgon head, horrifying
 omen of cataclysmic Zeus Decider. And with helmet
 on she strode onward as if breathing flames of fire and stepped
 up into her chariot. She seized her spear, huge and heavy
 and strong, ready to obliterate whole lines of warriors
 who displease her, the daughter of a mighty father.

Then Hera snapped the whip over the horses, and eagerly
 they sprang like a crack of lightning onward : and in front of her
 the gates of heaven, the passageway of dense, thick cloud, parted,
 releasing a deep, prolonged rumbling thunder as they moved
 aside to let her through. It was the Horai, solemn goddesses
 of the air and circling seasons, who possessed the authority
 in high heaven and Olympus to open these doors, or pull
 them to. So the horses galloped through the corridor of cloud,
 spurred by the spark of the whip on their backs, and came to the son
 of castrating Cronos, sitting alone on the topmost peak
 of the many summits of Olympus. There, Queen Hera, wife
 to Zeus Highest, with queenly style delivered a question :

“Zeus Father! Have you no answer for Ἄρης and his horrid
 work? He’s destroying the army of the excellent Achaeans

wildly, having no thought of my tears! While Aphrodite
and Apollo, lounging at their ease and happy to watch this,
are allowed to goad this madman to run wild, like a dog,
who knows nothing of the old, established, customary laws!
Zeus Husband, will you be angry if I strike Ἄρης sternly,
and take him out of the battle?"

And Zeus answered :

"Set Athena Bright-Eyes on him. Indulge her habit of bringing
more misery to him than any other power cares to do."

And that was Zeus' word, and Queen Hera did not disobey.

She lashed her horses, and spiritedly they galloped between
earth and sparkling heaven. So far as a man on a hilltop
can see to the far end of the wine-dark sea could the horses
spring in one bound, high-neighing high above the mists of the earth.

And when they came to Troy, where the two rivers of the plain meet,
the Simoïs and the Scamander, and run together as one,
she stayed the horses, and loosed them, and rendered them invisible :
and the river Simoïs sent ambrosia gushing up
for the horses to feed on.

The goddesses flew as doves through the crazed lines of warriors,
eager to defend the Argives. And they saw many of the best
Achaean men, crowded together and jostling each other
in battle, clashing like lions ravening each other's raw
flesh, or wild boars, whose strength is not easily exhausted.
There, where Diomedes stood prominent in the turbulence,

the voice of Queen Hera filled the air, emerging from the sea-shell, a hollowed spiral, lifted to the lips of the great-hearted Stentor, the indomitable-voiced herald of the people, who spoke as loud as the shout of fifty other men, and said :

“Come on, you unmanly, prettified cowards! If Achilles were here, the Trojans would be hiding inside the Dardanian gate! Why is it only his spear that terrifies them? Because now they fight far from the city, getting closer to our ships!”

So spoke Hera, and when the men heard this, each was roused at heart, and filled with strength.

And Athena Bright-Eyes flew to the side of the son of Tydeus, Diomedes, who had jumped from his chariot. Standing beside his horses, he was cooling off the wound in his shoulder from Pandaros' arrow. The sweat under his shield's leather strap, buckled across his chest from his right shoulder, irritated the wound, which had wearied his arm : so now he was holding the strap to one side, its leather clouded with his dark blood, and was wiping away the blood from his skin.

Then the goddess took hold of his horses, her hand on the cross-tree, and said :

“You are not much like your father Tydeus. He was compact in build, but a warrior, and could wage out-of-line war with lightning swiftness. Who doesn't know the tale of Tydeus and the Cadmeians? He had come from far, all alone, a stranger in Mycenae,

on an embassy to Thebe amid many Cadmeians;
 and though I requested of him to rest at ease,
 and be of good cheer, and enjoy the feast, he challenged every
 last youth and man there, showing the undisturbable spirit
 of the men of old, and won easily.

Because I helped him.

Now I come here to encourage you, and watch you.
 I earnestly ask you to enter the fight with the Trojans!
 But perhaps your fury in the fight has wearied
 the son of Tydeus? and your arm sinks down now?
 Or maybe you're scared. In that case you would most definitely
 be smaller than your father Tydeus, the battle-wise son
 of Oeneus, who loved pouring the wine."

And Diomedes answered her :

"I recognize you, daughter of Zeus, goddess of brightest eyes,
 by your shield. To you I will speak my mind and not hold back.
 Do you see me cringing in fear before you? Do you see any
 cowardly hesitation in me at all, though I face your shield?
 I still act on your command given me : 'do not fight face to face
 with any Immortal—except Aphrodite'. You told me
 to cut her if I saw her. But I also saw Ἄρης , with
 the Trojans. So, I am withdrawing from the field, and have urged
 all the other Argives to do the same—for as long as Ἄρης
 Invincible commands the other end of the battle-lines."

And Athena Bright-Eyes answered him :

“Son of Tydeus, Diomedes, pleasing to my heart,
fear no other, neither Ἄρης , nor any Immortal,
so long as I am here to help you.

As for Ἄρης ,
attack that impetuous madman! Charge at him
with your horses and face him in hand-to-hand fight!
We got to stop him! His all-encompassing rage
has no boundaries. First he’s on one side, then he’s on
another. Ἄρης is a two-faced, loner outlaw—who yet
manipulates all men on earth!

Earlier he spoke
with Hera and me, and implied he might demolish
the Trojans, and support the Argives : and yet now
he’s kicked you and those promises out of his thoughts.”

As she spoke she reached a hand out at Sthenelus, and pushed back :
and he leapt from the chariot to the ground. Then Athena
eagerly stepped up into the spot beside Diomedes.
She seized the whip and reins, and drove the chariot toward Ἄρης .
Beneath them the oakwood axle creaked and groaned
as it turned under its burden of goddess and warrior.

Ἄρης , meanwhile, high on war, had just killed a mortal man
for the only time in Homer, and was even now stooping
to strip the dead of its armour. The warrior that Ἄρης had
condescended to kill was the monstrously huge Periphas,
the greatest of the Aetolians, Ochesius’ son.
Bloody Ἄρης War God was tearing the armour from the body,

and Athena put on her robe of invisibility,
so that the beastly Ἴαρκος did not see her coming

when he looked up to see the chariot of Diomedes
bearing down on him. So the Man-Destroyer flung the body
to the ground, and rushed at Diomedes. And when they were close
to one another, Ἴαρκος raised his spear and let fly. It was
a perfect shot, rising over the yoke and the reins, eager
to take down Diomedes.

But Athena Bright-Eyes reached out
and caught the spear with a hand, and flung it away aimlessly.

Diomedes then flung at Ἴαρκος his own bronze-pointed spear.
And Athena Bright-Eyes leaned into it as the sharp tip raced
into his lower belly, tearing through his immortal body;
while mighty Diomedes sped away on his chariot.

So Ἴαρκος tore out the spear with a mighty scream, and snapped it
in two, and his scream thundered louder than all the warriors
merged with Ἴαρκος in combat. And all Achaeans and Trojans
quivered in terror at the sound. The entire plain was seized
with panic, so great was the roar of Ἴαρκος, insatiable for war.

Just as a dust-cloud appears darkly between earth and heaven
when after burning heat a wind springs up, steamy and edgy :
even so did Ἴαρκος give to Diomedes a baneful
and uneasy feeling as the god shot up into the clouds,
flying far and away into endless sky, and out of sight.

Straightaway he came to the space of the gods, high Olympus;

and he sat down with a vexed wince beside Highest Zeus Father,
and showed him the immortal blood flowing from the hateful wound;
and with woeful lament he spoke to Zeus Merciful :

“Father,” he asked, “I wonder if this gruesome sight enrages
you. Always we gods must be quarrelling intolerably
with one another, all the while showing goodwill to worthless
man! You’ve exasperated us all to fury by bringing
that senseless girl to being! She curses us continually!
Athena’s mind is always hatching new acts of wickedness.

All the other gods who live on Olympus follow your word,
and are respectful to you, each and all of us—except her!
But no matter what she does you pay her no mind. In fact, you
incite her! Because that destructive girl came from your own head.

Look at what that despicable, insulting ‘son of Tydeus’
has done! With Athena helping him he’s now attacking gods!
First he scratches Aphrodite on the hand by the wrist, now he
charges at me as if a god himself! If I didn’t outrun
him I might have caught some trouble. I might’ve been left paralysed
from a rain of spears, lying there on a carpet of dead men.”

Then angrily answered Zeus Cloud-Gatherer :

“Don’t sit by me whining, you many-faced monster! I despise
you more than anyone else on Olympus. Always you bring
quarrel and war and riot. You’re too like your mother, our Hera,
our barely endurable and too-stubborn Hera! Ah!
I can hardly contain my own anger at the moment—I
can barely speak! It is all from her suggestions, I am sure,

that you have come to feel this pain at your side.

However, I,
and Queen Hera, cannot have our son in such a way. But if
you had been the child of any other god I would let you
suffer. You are so destructive, so uncontrollable, that you
should be down with the lowest gods, not with the heavenly ones.”

Thus spoke Zeus, and requested of Paeon to heal his son’s wound.

So master healer Paeon administered pain-killing herbs
to Ἴαπων, and sealed the gruesome wound in the blink of an eye,
as Ἴαπων was made of nothing mortal. As quick as fig-juice
thickens the white milk as a man stirs it in, just so swiftly
did the wound of Ἴαπων scab over then purify again.
Then Hebe, sweet goddess of youth, bathed him,
and dressed him in elegant garments. Then he sat
down by the side of Zeus; and the pair was wondrous to see.

Then Argive Hera and Alalcomenean Athena
returned to the palace of the great god Zeus, where they had sent
Ἴαπων, after bringing an end to his man-slaughtering work.

End of Book V

Book VI

And so the gods for now abandoned the disagreeable
 battle to the merely mortal men themselves, the Achaeans
 and Trojans, who clashed across the wide plain, advancing fiercely
 on each other, using bronze-tipped spears and two-edged swords, heavy
 shields, and their bare hands, clashing between the river Simoïs
 and the stagnant marshland of mosquitoes and crickets skirting
 the waves of the endless sea.

Ajax, son of Telamon, was the first of the Achaeans
 to weaken the Trojan onslaught, rousing hope in his fellow
 warriors. Blood-soaked down to the soles of his feet, blood dripping
 even from his eyelashes, stepping over the wounded writhing,
 and the freshly dead, he grappled with Acamas, the best man
 of the Thracians, Eüssorus' son, colossal
 in size and courageous. But Ajax grabbed a spear and hammered
 its bronze tip straight through his helmet and onward to his forehead
 and did not stop but pushed on, shattering bone and entering
 the brain : so his eyes misted, as man-eating death gobbled him
 down to the underworld, which took his soul, but ignored the body,
 which was left to rot, for all Hades cared.

In the turbulence mighty Diomedes saw Axylus
 running through the Trojan lines, jumping over carved-up bodies
 between lightning-quick spear strikes from the Achaeans. Teuthras' son,
 he lived in beautiful Aribè, a wealthy man whom people
 all over respected, for he used to welcome all manner
 of men into his house, which stood by a highway, and entertain
 them as guests. But not one of these guests was present to protect
 him from a miserable death, when he came to meet screaming

Diomedes and his stinging sword : and he took not only
the one life but Axylus' charioteer Calesius'
as well : so the two went down below, more fresh souls for Hades.

And Euryalus killed Dresus and Opheltius, then chased down
Aesepus and Pedasus, whom the nymph Abarbarea
of the clear river waters birthed to noble Bucolion.
This Bucolion was the eldest son of ancient Trojan
king Laomedon, and therefore half-brother to King Priam,
yet was unknown as such, being the issue of a secret love.
Long ago Laomedon, while off in the fields, tending
his flocks, lay with the river Naiad in the grass, and she birthed
twin sons. These two Euryalus, son of Mecisteus, cut
down in gory rampage, and snatched their armour away.

On the dreadful field of battle, many a warrior died
of whom no record remains. Their names were lost along with their
wind-swift lives. And many a name noted just here are otherwise
unknown : Immovable Polypoetes killed Astyalus;
Odysseus' bronze spear killed Pidytes from Perkote;
and δῖος Teucer killed Aretaon. And Antilochus
son of Nestor put his shining spear through Ablerus; and king
Agamemnon killed Elatus, who left the heights of Pedasus
by the lovely river Satnioeis to die in the war.
The excellent Leïtus took down Phylacus as he fled from him;
and Eurypylus killed Melanthius.

And δῖος Agamemnon, his armour steaming with gore, rushed
to defend Menelaus : as Adrastus, screeching a war-
cry, came blazing over the plain, his cruel spear raised to bury
itself in Menelaus' body. But as he approached,

his two wildly galloping horses got their hooves entangled
 in a fallen twist of tamarisk branches, and their strong legs
 buckled, and the pole of the chariot snapped in two : while
 the horses ran on, therefore, in wild terror toward the city,
 where many a cowardly person was rushing in panic flight,
 the broken chariot of Adrastus, before the eyes of
 Agamemnon and his brother, flung over helter-skelter
 and smashed to the earth, and Adrastus rolled out into the dust.

So the sons of Atreus strode to their would-be murderer, spear
 poised in Menelaus' grip, while army commander
 Agamemnon lifted his blood-slicked blade. But when they came to
 Adrastus, he flung both his arms round Menelaus' knees,
 and spoke :

"Sons of Atreus!" he said. "In the name of Zeus and all the powers!
 Let me live, and I give you treasures beyond imagination!
 Waiting for you in my father's store-room are valuables
 of iron and bronze and gold, all of workmanship too lovely
 to tell of! My father will gladly pay you a tribute beyond
 number, if he hears I'm alive by the ships of the Achaeans!"

So he spoke, and, hearing this, the two brothers eyed each other :
 and Menelaus was the first to speak, saying :

"If my servant isn't dead, he can lead him down to the ships."

But Agamemnon replied :

"Let this man's father enjoy his own valuables. Menelaus!
 You would show kindness *now*? No. We will kill every one of them,

even the child embedded in the womb, along with its mother.
One day we'll look, and see Troy gone, forgotten in sight and mind."

So he spoke, and, hearing this, the two brothers eyed each other :
and finally Agamemnon sheathed his sword, and took the spear
from his brother's hand, and drove it through the heart of Adrastus,
and his long-voyaged body reached its end. Then Agamemnon
stepped on the corpse for leverage, and pulled the bloody spear out,
and handed it to his brother Menelaus, then went off
into the flaring part of the battlefield.

Then, Nestor, teacher of men, yelled to the Argives around him :

"All Danaan warriors!" he shouted. "All friends of Ἄρης !
Stop throwing yourself on the spoils, all you imbeciles
competing to carry the most armour back to the ships!
Kill everyone first! Collect your armour later, at peace,
when all the Trojan corpses lie untroublesome on the plain!"

Thus spoke Nestor, and his fighting words encouraged all his men.

So the balance of slaughterous havoc tilted to Achaean
once more; and they pushed at the Trojans, bold swords pummeling shields,
driving them backward along the sanguinary plain; so whenever
a warrior took a step on the soft, saturated soil,
the footprint left behind him filled up with the wine-dark blood.

And son of Priam Helenus, watching his men struggling
back toward walled Troy, where, he feared, their weakness
promised them joyless destruction, marked a flock of birds crossing
the sky, and read implications in the pattern of their flight.

Armed with this new knowledge, Helenus rushed to see Aeneas and Hector, and to these supreme commanders of the Trojans, their foremost prophet spoke out :

“You two!” he said. “Follow my pointing finger and I shall show you our approach of attack! This vision has been granted me! Listen!—or see our men be pushed to the city, and there be butchered in the arms of their wives, to delight our enemies!”

So he spoke, and, hearing this, the two leaders eyed each other : and Helenus continued :

“We must hold our ground here, and here,” he said, guiding their regard with gestures. “Go now, gather the warriors in these places I indicate, and compel them to fight through their weariness and stand their ground, or they will lose everything. *This* is the weight of necessity just now. You, Aeneas, go rouse the men and school them in our plan. I must speak one word more with Hector.”

So he spoke, and, hearing this, the two leaders eyed each other : then Hector nodded, and Aeneas ran off to his duties.

And Helenus continued :

“Hector, go up into the city and speak to our mother. Tell her to summon the grand ladies, and have all them gather at the temple of Athena. Our mother herself will unbolt the doors and lead them into the sacred rooms. Then tell her to choose the most charming robe on hand in her hall, whichever one our mother finds nearest to her own heart’s favour : this robe she will lay across the knees of the seated Athena Saviour.”

This he said, and Hector nodded, but Helenus continued :

“I feel that Athena was here, over the field of battle,
but has left us, and we require her back : so you, Hector,
will have our mother promise a sacrifice to the Bright-Eyed :
twelve head of cattle, each a yearling innocent of the yoke,
will be given to Athena Defender, if the goddess
shows pity to Ilium and its mothers and their smiling
babies, and holds off Diomedes from entering the city,
the son of Tydeus, who rages like a wild animal,
a mighty influencer of panic. I call him the best
warrior of the Achaeans, and he has to be stopped.”

And as he was speaking Hector asked him :

“He is a warrior better than Achilles?”

And Helenus answered him :

“We have nothing to fear from Achilles—he’s not in the fight.

But I am unsure if we ever feared Achilles in the way
we now retreat before this Diomedes, who slaughters us
in a raging frenzy. No one on the field seems his equal.”

Thus spoke Helenus, and Hector bristled, but followed his word.

Hector, then, from his chariot, in full armour, sprang to the ground;
and fearful was the rattle of the bronze upon his body
as he moved through the lines of his army, his two sharp-tipped spears

raised high, to inspire his warriors, and urge them to fight :

“All great-hearted Trojans!” he yelled out. “All illustrious allies!
Be men! Rouse your strength! Tear them apart! My friends, be courageous!

I go now into the city, to make prayer to the gods,
to grant us strength to annihilate our enemies utterly!”

So he spoke, and kindled the battle-cry in his warriors,
who rallied forward fiery-minded against the Argives,
raising a terrifying shout over the whistling spears
and clashing bronze swords; and the clamorous slaughter continued,
till finally the Achaean army retreated, thinking
one of the Immortals had come down from sparkling heaven
to fight with them; and the Achaeans knew a fight with the gods
was unwinnable.

So when the Achaean army redrew, a gap of earth was
opened up between the antagonists. Standing opposite,
each man breathed fury at the other facing across the way,
exhausted, blood-soaked, yet still greedy to kill every last man.
As for the Trojan warriors, Hector their leader was off
the field, so as his men awaited orders to this new turn
of battle, they lowered their spears, though kept ready to strike.
And as the Achaean warriors themselves waited for orders,
Agamemnon and Menelaus, commanders of the men,
speaking in counsel somewhere in the dense crush of their army,
had not yet delivered a response. So the gory-stained field,
soiled in unspeakable carnage, in sudden calm, waited,
and each man sent out heated waves of fury into the sky.

And into the gap galloped the chariot of Glaucus, son of Hippolochus; and against him came Diomedes, son of Tydeus. So from either end of the standing armies they converged, pulled their horses to, and halted their chariots. But, though eager to fight, neither warrior yet raised his spear. And both armies held their silence as the two warriors met.

And mighty Diomedes was the first to speak out, saying :

“You—one of the bravest warriors on this field : Who are you? Before now I had yet to see you in this fight. But here you are, come forward to face me in confidence, and you stand your ground boldly with the spear. But hear this, before you raise your weapon : Unlucky are those whose children meet my anger face to face.

But if you are an Immortal, you must tell me so. We men have learned not to challenge the invincible gods. Not even powerful Lycurgus, son of Dryas, could overcome them, even with all his strength. He offended wild Dionysius, so the gods took him down to the underworld. First they blinded him, however, simply to make him suffer. So I will not raise my spear against any god. But if you are a man, be afraid.

Come closer to me, if you dare, so you may learn just how quick a man can die.”

Then mighty Glaucus answered him :

“But I know you, son of Tydeus. And why do you ask me of my origin? I am a man, and nothing more than that. Just as the leaves that the trees scatter to the ground—such are men.”

And Diomedes replied :

“Winds do drop leaves down upon the earth, yes. Then trees breed anew,
when the season of spring comes in its fullness.”

And Glaucus replied :

“As you say. One people come, but another first have to die.”

And as the two warriors glared at each other from their cars,
Glaucus continued :

“If you would hear what you ask of, son of Tydeus : I come
from city Ephyre, home of my ancestor Sisyphus,
him whom people called ‘the artful one’. He fathered a son,
Glaucus. He was father to the excellent Bellerophon,
whom people said heaven granted him beauty and commanding
manliness. Will you hear now what became of all this beauty?

Anteia, wife to king Proteus, took a mad desire
for Bellerophon, whom her husband had just subjugated,
with all his people, beneath his callous sceptre. So the hero
was brought before the queen’s presence, and she would have him love her
in secret, but Bellerophon, of the Argives, refused her
advances, for his heart was too strong to be seduced by her.

So Anteia spoke lies to king Proteus. ‘You must kill Bellerophon,’ she said.

‘The man disgusts me. I was out, and he put his hands on me.’

So Proteus heard this, and ordinary revenge pleased him
not at all, as such a rage had taken a hold inside him

for Bellerophon and all his people. So the king sent him,
befriending him in outward fashion, to where the Xanthus swirls.

But there he put on this hero the fire-breathing Chimaera :
goddess-born monster, no relation to men : a lion in front,
tapering to a fluttery serpent behind, but in her
middle, the body of a goat. From her open mouth she breathed
out furious blazing fire. But Bellerophon killed her,
for he could read the signs of the gods. But this great victory
was but freshly born when the Solymi, the most ingenious
people he ever had to fight, came in a swarm through the fumes
of the vile beast. But he cut those men down, too. Then he met
the match of men, a band of Amazons : yet another ambush
he entirely eliminated. And then his sharp sword
was sated, but the king wasn't finished : he weaved an ambush
of the best and bravest of the Lycians : but not a one
went home, for excellent Bellerophon killed every last man.

And for all that he became the king of Lycia; but time
blinks an eye, and now he's wandering alone over the Aleian
plain, and the Solymi have killed his son, and fair Artemis
has killed his daughter : but I, son of Bellerophon, live still.
Do you think he has sent me here not to be always the bravest
and most distinguished among the others? I have now answered
your question. And I shall not shame my family, the greatest
of Ephyre and of widespread Lycia. That is who I am."

Thus spoke Glaucus. Mighty Diomedes, then, smiling, raised
his spear, only to rest its sharp tip against the earth. He spoke
mild words to Glaucus, leader of men :

“Long ago your father and my father were friends,” he now said.

“My father Oeneus received δῖος Bellerophon twenty days
in his halls, giving him all the hospitality and friendship
one might give to another. And each gave the other beautiful
gifts. Oeneus presented a warrior’s belt of leather dyed
a brilliant purple, and Bellerophon a two-handled
drinking cup which even now stands prominent in my palace,
there when I left for Troy. Thus it is I am a friend to you,
and I hope to you in Lycia; so that if we ever
travel in the other’s land, the one will welcome the other.

So let us lower our weapons from one another, even
in the eyes of all these men, entire armies. For in yours
there are many another celebrated Trojan and ally
whom god may permit me to catch, and my hands to take away.”

So spoke Diomedes. And Glaucus responded :

“And many an Achaean in combat awaits death with these
hands, too, god willing. But you and I : let us exchange armour,
so all men here know we’re friends from our fathers’ days.”

So in this way they spoke with one another, then both men jumped
from their chariots to the earth, and took hold of each other’s hand
in friendship : and the gods above, some of them, laughed in mockery
when the two warriors exchanged armour. For mighty Glaucus
handed over a golden panoply, while Diomedes
gave him his bronze : in truth the equivalent of an exchange
of a hundred oxen for nine head of cattle.

Meanwhile, pre-eminent of Trojans, Hector,

had come to the majestic Scaean gate, where the
 wives and daughters of the warriors on the field
 crowded round him, by the tall oak, to ask after
 their sons and brothers and friends; and of their husbands.

And Hector spoke :

“All good citizens,” he said. “Pray for victory.”

And many women dropped their heads in worry.

Then δῖος Hector went inside the city walls
 and came to the lofty palace of his father,
 King Priam. Rows of glimmering colonnades
 of polished stone surrounded a central courtyard.
 On one side stood the building where the king and queen
 held residence : inside there were fifty chambers,
 each of shining stone, and each built hard-by the next,
 where the sons of Priam lay down to rest beside
 their betrothed wives. While the daughters of Priam
 inhabited the opposite side of the court,
 a separate building of twelve sumptuous chambers,
 itself roofed over and efficient in build, and bright
 with polished stone : therein slept Priam’s sons-in-law
 beside their goodly wives. So it was in this court-
 yard that Hector came to meet his honoured mother,
 the kind Queen Hecuba, who was strolling alongside
 the most beautiful of all of her daughters, Laodice.
 The queen pressed his hand to her heart, called him by name,
 and spoke :

“My child!” she said. “Why have you left the battlefield?
 Ah,” she continued, “our army has been worn down
 to the walls, and those-people-who-will-not-be-named
 surround us, and impress upon us, and we breathe
 our last free breath! You have come to pour to the gods
 with us one final time, in fidelity. I will go now
 and bring us the honey-sweet wine.”

And to all this mighty Hector of the glinting armour replied :

“Mother! Bring us no wine. Nor do these unwashed
 hands need pour to the gods just now; nor should a man
 defiled in bloody dust make sanctimonious prayer
 to Zeus Orderer. Please, queen of Troy, listen now,
 and I shall say what you must do, as instructed
 by your son Helenus.

Mother, go now to the temple of Athena,
 and bring offerings to the god, with an escort
 of the grand ladies of Troy. Choose your loveliest robe
 for the temple, the one nearest to your own heart :
 this robe you will lay across the knees of Athena.

You will make promise to Athena Defender :
 twelve head of cattle, each a yearling innocent of discipline,
 if the goddess shows pity to Ilium and its mothers
 and their little babies, and holds off wild Diomedes
 from entering the city—who rages like an animal,
 a mighty influencer of panic. Mother,
 go now to the temple of Athena.

I go now to summon Paris—if he will hear me.
He woos the world to battle, then retreats to bed.”

So he spoke, and his kind mother released his hand.
Then she walked among the halls and summoned
her handmaids; who then went through the city
and gathered together the grand ladies of Troy.

Meanwhile, the queen herself went down to a room
under the house, a treasure-chamber redolent
of incense, and went to the place of her garments.
She admired her robes of elaborate embroidery,
the elegant hand-work of Sidonian women, whom her
Alexandros had brought back with him from Sidon,
when he had sailed home with noble Helen over the sea.
Queen Hecuba raised up the largest and most beautiful robe,
choosing it for Athena Defender : she had brought it out
from under the others, and it glittered like stars.

So, taking the robe with her, the queen went forth to the temple
of Athena; and beside her were the grand ladies of Troy.

Together they advanced into the heart
of the city, where the shining temple
of Athena predominated. Its doors
were drawn open for them by Theano,
ethereal daughter of Cisseus,
wife to the king’s wise counsellor Antenor.
To honour her mastery of philosophy
and mathematics, the people of Troy
established her as priestess of Athena.

The temple air inside was a pleasing,
 soothing congruency. But, lifting
 their hands up high, the grand ladies let out
 a cry to Athena : and during that,
 ethereal Theano lifted her arms
 up to receive the robe, and set it down
 on the knees of Athena, Defender
 of the city, murmuring to herself
 reverently in prayer :

“Mistress Athena, possessor of Truth,
 of all goddesses the δῖος : protect us :
 shatter in pieces the spear of Diomedes—
 and he shall fall face-first by our high gates!
 May you bring this to be, most excellent
 counsellor! We shall give a gift to you
 of twelve innocent yearlings, if you show
 pity on Ilium, and its mothers,
 and its smiling babies.”

So prayed Theano.

But to all this Athena only raised her chin in contempt.

So, while the grand ladies prayed, mighty Hector
 rushed to the sumptuous home of Alexandros,
 a palace raised with Hector’s own two hands helping
 the best of the Trojan artisans, a beautiful
 sight in the city of dazzling views. They had built
 for Alexandros the house, the reception hall,

the courtyard, and all additions, on a lush parcel
settled by the palaces of Priam and Hector,
within the city walls.

So Hector went in, spear held lightly in his hand,
a slender lethality eleven cubits long.
And as he moved through the delicate halls, his spear's
sharp tip sparkling, and its lashing of wire,
that fixed the bronze tip to the ashen shaft, shining
as a thin gold band in the sunlight before him,
he left not a scratch nor a tilt in the well-appointed rooms.

Hector found his brother in his comfortable,
plush bedchamber, together with Argive Helen
and her handmaidens. He was sitting with head bent
to his exquisitely carved armour, polishing
it all : his shield, his breast-plate; even his curved bow
was there. Just as Helen was requesting of her
handmaids this or that job for them to do for her,
Hector stepped in, and looked on angrily, and spoke
harsh and dreadful words :

"Fool! Do you not know your absence makes things worse for all of us?
As for the prattle that redounds on me, no matter of that
for now. Do you not understand the army's getting wasted
out there? and the combat comes ever closer to the city walls?
All this is your mess, and you sit here cleaning your toys?
What if I were you stepping into here, to see
this abominable sight, when all your brothers
and friends are out there struggling in the fight? Stop this!
Come with me now and help keep the city from ruin!"

And δῖος Alexandros, formed as beautifully
as a god, answered his older brother, carefully :

“Hector, your words are just, yet only descriptive
outwardly. Yes, I sit in my bedchamber, from shame.
I haven’t yet forgotten what happened before all the men.
Even so—your words are just. But just now, my wife
spoke gentle motivations to move me to battle,
and I agreed; and as you came, I was preparing
to go, as victory may turn on a single man.
So come now! Why not take a seat while I get
into my armour; or go, and I’ll be with you
soon. Ah, I’m certain I’ll surpass you in battle!”

So spoke δῖος Alexandros, and to it all
his brother, standing in his gory battle-plate,
said not a word.

Then, gently, to calm Hector’s anger, Helen spoke :

“Ah, brother,” she said. “I’m the malicious bitch that started this,
horrible to look at! I see the day my mother gave birth
to me, and a breath of wind lifts me on its wings, off and away
to a mountain somewhere, or it releases me into the sea,
and I never come to be, and these things never come to be.

And yet the gods fix the way of all things—so that would include
all these evils. Funny that an infatuation brought us here.”

And to this neither Hector nor Alexandros gave answer,

so Helen continued, and said :

“But just now I was saying, right before you came in, that I deserved a better man as husband—one who can read for himself the judgment of men, and not *stay* a shame and disgrace! But the spirit of this man is a wandering one : it floats among the clouds, and the light of the high air dims his sight. I fear that down on earth his blindness will bring ruin.”

And to this, too, neither Hector nor Alexandros replied, so Helen continued :

“Come now! Why not enter in properly, and sit down on this chair? Ah, great Hector, you have suffered most of all from this god-brought infatuation—because of your brother’s affinity with dog-faced me! Zeus has set an evil fate on all of us. In days to come they’ll sing songs about us.”

Then Hector, his bloody armour rattling, answered her :

“I am not sitting down. Though you may love me dearly, Helen, I must go and defend the city from utter destruction. I must go and bring aid to my fellow Trojans. So you rouse your husband to ‘surpass me’ on our way to the battlefield, and we may meet before I leave the walls. Because I have one more place to go—home. I must see my wife and little son. It may be the last I ever see of them. And for all I know some Achaean may cut me down before I even get there.”

So said Hector, and left the room. Quickly he came
to his shining palace, only to discover
his dear wife Andromache missing from his halls,
and his child, too. So he rushed to the threshold,
and looked out and around, and spoke loudly to all
the house-women, saying :

“Come, women,” he said, “tell me now, and tell me straight :
Where is Andromache? Why is my wife not here?
I can think of a few places she could be : she’s
with one of my sisters, or with my brothers’ wives,
or she’s gone with the escort to the temple of Athena.
Which is it?”

And so his conscientious housekeeper spoke out :

“Hector,” she said, “as you say, I hear and answer.
Your wife is not with one of your sisters, or with
your brothers’ wives, nor has she gone to the temple
of Athena with the escort praying for deliverance.
Andromache has gone to the Wall, and I think
she may be up high, looking out over the field.
When she heard of the Trojans’ distress in the fight,
and of the overwhelming Achaean army
cutting our numbers down, she rushed out with the child
in mad terror, and could not be stopped. So the nurse went with her.”

So she answered, and Hector left the house at once.
Quickly he retraced his steps over the well-paved
streets, moving armoured through the wide, spread-out city.

When he came to the gate, the Scaean gate, he looked
through and saw the plain, and thought of rushing to fight—

when he saw his wife running to meet him.
Lovely Andromache, the elegant daughter
of great-hearted Eëtion, who once was king
over the men of Cilicia in Thebe,
under the mystical forests of Mount Placus.
It was his fair daughter that Hector had married,
who now stood before her in his bloody armour.

But Andromache came close and threw her arms round
her husband, and man and wife embraced. And he saw
the nursemaid standing behind her, holding his son
Scamandrius, just an infant, and well-beloved
of Hector, as fine as a star. And Hector smiled.
He looked at his son in silence while his wife
wept on his shoulder.

Then, joining their hands, she spoke to him, and said :

“Dear man, I was scared you were dead. Hector!
How terrible is courage! Do you not
pity your little son, who has not yet
said your name? Ah, unlucky star that burned
over my birth! Would you have me a widow?
We all see that army coming—they will come
and kill you! I shall not let you go alone.
It were better for me to go with you
down under the earth, if you must go first;
for I will have no more happiness here.

My father and mother are dead. You're all I have."

And as Andromache clung to her husband, she continued :

"That disgusting Achilles killed my father!" she said,
dropping her head on her Hector's shoulder. "He came
crashing into our city just to steal everything,
into beautiful Thebe, and killed many of my people.
Just to take things. But he didn't take my father's
armour off his body. That's one thing he didn't take.
Whether he respected the height of my father
the king, or for whatever reason, he ignored
my father's armour, which I remember was very
beautiful, carven all over with delicate fineness.

Achilles burned the body and all the armour,
and my father was buried. I saw mountain nymphs
come down to plant what later rose up as elm trees
all round the tomb : the daughters of God Zeus, who lets
all things happen. All my seven brothers died by
Achilles' hand, who moved quickly, very quickly.
All their bodies lay there by the cattle and sheep,
while their souls had gone down to Hades.

My mother!

She he took with him—though his arms were already
well full of our treasure—she, the queen of Placus
Mountain! But he kindly her let go when we who
still lived gave him even more of ourselves, our gold
and silver, whatever was left to us. But she died,
of a broken heart. They say it was Artemis

who shot the arrow of pity that took her life
from me.”

And Andromache held her husband tighter to say :

“No, Hector! You are my father and my gracious mother now!
You are my brothers to me; and you are my beautiful husband.
So come! Think of me, and stay by my side within
the city. Don’t make your wife a widow and your son an orphan.

The army that comes—keep them behind the fig tree.
The wall after it is unsafe, and the city
is open there to invasion. Three times now they’ve
almost come over, and it took you to stop them.
I know their names now. Ajax—the two Ajaxes.
The sons of Atreus. Idomeneus, a name
everyone knows—now. And the son of Tydeus,
whom even you warn us all of. Three times now they’ve
almost come over. Maybe they have a prophet
who sees well, or maybe they’re just too strong to stop!”

Then Hector answered her :

“Andromache,” he said, “you’re always in my thoughts,
but I have no choice, and you know that : I command
all the men, and how would it look if their leader
crept away from the field to hide among the Trojan
women in their gentle robes? In truth, you and I
know I have no other choice in my heart but to fight :
every grain in my body compels me to stand
at the front-line to protect the women of Troy,

with my sword, my spear, and my bare hands. If I fight
as my father fought, I will know the feeling of great
glory.”

And Hector stopped, then began again :

“My love, let me tell you what’s in my heart. Even
as I fight, and push, still I still the day, I don’t
know why, when Troy will be reduced to dust,
our beloved city, gone—my father, and all the people.
Why would I see that, unless it were truth yet to be?
I feel the grief of the Trojans, and see dead the king
and queen, my mother and father. And all my brothers,
dead, dropped to the dust by the bronze-armoured ones.
Yet all that pain is as light compared to what I see for you.”

Again Hector stopped, and Andromache waited, then he said :

“I see, through your own tears, your last day of freedom.
I see you weaving at the loom of some Achaean
master. I see you stolen away to Argos,
or to Messeïs, or to Hypereïs, to bear
water, at the bidding of some other woman.

And someone will see your tears, and say, ‘she was wife
to Hector, the “bravest” to fight of all the “horse-
taming” Trojans, back when men fought around the city of Troy.’

So they will say that. For giving grief is the great
trade of humankind. At that time, as your tears come
you will think of your lost husband who should have

defended you from your unhappy fate.

So let me be dead! Let me lie covered by earth.

So I can't hear your cries as they carry you away."

Thus spoke Hector, who then raised his shining helmet to his head,
and reached out for his son. But the child recoiled
in terror at the sight of the shimmering tuft
of horsehair, cresting in terrible colours over
the man's eyes; and buried his face in his nurse's breast.

And his father and mother couldn't help but laugh,
and Hector removed his shining helmet and put it
on the ground. And then he took his much-loved son
into his arms, and kissed him, and prayed to all the gods :

"Zeus, make my son strong, and good, and among the best
of the Trojans, so that one day he may come forth
from the punishing battlefield and men will say
of him, 'He is far better than his father was.'
And may his mother be happy at that."

So he spoke, and laid his son in Andromache's
arms, who brought her child to her sweet-scented breasts,
smiling through tears, and it hurt her husband's heart
to see it. So he took her in his arms again
and called her by name, and said :

"Marvellous woman! Please go back now to the house,
and look after our son. All will stay solid
—until I can help things no longer. Certainly

I shall not go untimely. I've yet to meet the man
in battle who's beaten my hand. Go now to the house;
see to all things there. My only way forward must be to war."

This he said, then brought his helmet up to his head.
So his wife turned round and began to walk away.
But then she looked over her shoulder, to see her
man-killing husband standing in his dusty armour.
And as she walked on, she kept turning round to see,
until the time she looked, to find her husband gone.

When Andromache returned home, all of her handmaids
saw her tears; and in reply all burst out in cries
of sorrow. Yet they mourned a man who was not dead.

But Andromache mourned, too. Because she never
expected to see her husband alive again,
for all of Troy knew of the strength of the Achaean army.

Meanwhile, Alexandros had quickly got into
his armour of ornamented bronze; then hurried
through the city on swift feet, heading to battle.

Just as a horse, though comfortably stabled
and well-fed, yet breaks free, and gallops exhilaratedly
over the plain, and comes to the fair-flowing river,
where it loves to bathe, and stands proud in its freedom,
with head held high and mane fluttering at its shoulders;
and its legs then lead it to the feeding ground of mares :

just so did carefree Alexandros come down from lofty Troy,

walking in the fiery sun that danced upon his armour,
all the while laughing in freedom as he went on his way.
And he found his brother, the godly Hector, at the city gate,
about to head down to the plain, and enter into the fight.

And Alexandros spoke to him, saying :

“Ah, dear brother, I fear I’ve kept you waiting here,
though I came quick as could be—though not as quickly
as you would have preferred, evidently.”

And Hector in his glinting helmet answered him :

“Brother,” he said, “the men on the field saw you fight
with courage, and they respect you for that; but you’re
too readily idle and careless. I have to hear the men
speak shamefully of you, when they wonder where you are,
the reason of all the fighting; and that stings me very much.

But let’s get the hell out of here. We’ll worry about that later.

That is—if Zeus allows us to. Perhaps it shall be that the gods
allow us to put a mixing-bowl of victory in our halls,
for all to drink from, once we’ve driven off the strong-armed Achaeans.
Well, let us go.”

End of Book VI

Book VII

“With these words”—a brilliant opening by translator Samuel Butler in 1898—illustrious Hector, together with Alexandros, his brother, rushed through the city gates, eager for the fight and the sound of combat.

Just as rowers, wearied of driving the oar, sigh with pleasure as a favourable wind sweeps in from a god, and then relax their arms on the smooth firwood oars : just so, the two warriors brightened at the sight of the battle on the Scamander plain.

And all the Trojans cheered to see Hector arrive.

So Alexandros struck first : he unsheathed his sword and carved up Menesthius from Arne, the son of king Areithoüs the mace-man, and the fair-eyed Phylomedusa. So Hector ripped through Eiöneus’ throat with his piercing spear, from behind, and his eyes went blank. So Glaucus, son of Hippolochus, Lycian chief, threw his spear at Iphinoüs, Dexios’ son, as he raised himself onto his chariot to take the reins, but was hit in the shoulder, so as his horses bolted he tumbled off and rolled in the dust : then went further : he went down beneath the earth.

But far above the battlefield, up in highest Olympus, Athena Bright-Eyes observed the Trojans routing the Argives,

for her curiosity for the struggle was unbridled;
 so in an instant she stepped down from the peaks of Olympus
 onto the Trojan plain and into the battle assurgent.
 Then Apollo, watching from high-walled Troy, accelerated
 to her side; and she knew her brother supported the Trojans.
 So the two met by the oak tree overlooking the Scaean gate.

And Apollo Far-Reacher spoke first, saying :

“Why yet again are you here, Daughter of Good Health?
 What tells your heart to come see a senseless slaughter?
 Perhaps you’re here to impress your thumb down
 on the scale of victory—for the Danaans?
 Since you show not a jot of pity for the Trojans.

So hear me now, and it will go better for your friends.
 We shall let them rest from war and struggle—for today.
 Tomorrow let them fight their way to their fixed destiny.
 It doesn’t concern me; let them fight their way till Troy is dust.
 It’s obvious that its obliteration appeals to you goddesses.”

And Athena answered :

“Have it your way, Shooter. You may be right. In fact
 you are. I have come from Olympus to be with the men,
 both Trojans and Achaeans. So come then! Tell how
 you shall separate the warriors, and have them
 sit in silence each on their side?”

And Apollo replied :

“We’ll rouse heroic Hector, and maybe he’ll face off
in single combat : a face-to-face meeting in between
the two armies; they like that sort of thing. Have him
fight anyone you want; you choose the degree of struggle.
Let some angry bronze-armoured Achaean come, eager to match
man-to-man with Hector δῖος in battle.”

So he spoke, and Bright-Eyed Athena agreed with Apollo.

So as Hector re-entered his battle-lines, the visionary
Helenus, this time, achieved accurate sight : he saw the will
of the gods; then sought to satisfy their pleasure, so he went
to his brother Hector and related his dream-vision, saying :

“Hear me,” he said, “for I have heard the will
of the gods. They would have all warriors
lower their weapons, and themselves, to the earth,
and sit still, in peace. Such would please the gods.

After you’ve complied with this part, next you’re
to call out to the Achaeans to send forth
their best, to meet you in face-to-face fight.

But Hector, here’s the root of the matter :
your fate is not to fall just now. You can’t
lose; for I have heard the forever-born gods.”

So when Hector heard this from Helenus,
he smiled coldly.

So he went among his men, Hector, leader of the Trojan

army, and raised his spear high, but laterally, gripping it by the middle; then lowered it slowly : a sign for the men to sit. So all the Trojan lines sat down; and Agamemnon, in answer, likewise commanded the Argives to be seated.

And Athena and Apollo likewise sat down, but as vultures, settling their talons on the highest branch of the broad oak tree dedicated to Zeus Orderer. They looked on with perverse delight at the warriors of men, arranged in crowded rows of shields and helmets and spears. Just as when the West Wind pours itself into the sea and its ripple creasing the surface darkens the deep under it, so sat the lines of Achaeans and Trojans on the plain.

Thus, standing in the gap between the two armies, Hector spoke :

“Hear me,” he said, “all Trojans and well-armoured Achaeans, that I may speak my mind. High-thronéd God has ignored us, our oaths and promises; and we have been led to this position of great indeterminacy, which promises us a time, its duration unknown, of evil suffering, for all of us, Trojan and Achaean alike; until you tear down the walls of Troy, or are yourself cut down by your sea-going ships.

So I see before me now the best of the Achaeans.

Let he who wishes come forward to fight against Hector.

Thus I shall say, with everything as my witness :

if your man take me down, with sword, spear, axe, whatever, take all my armour, too, and carry it to your black ships.

But hear the following, and there shall be reciprocation :

allow the Trojans to take my body, so the Trojan wives
may lower me into the fire.

But if I take *him* down, if Apollo grant me victory,
his armour will come to hang in the temple of Apollo
within the walls of Troy. But the Achaeans will be allowed
his body, to give him due burial, and raise him a tomb
by the well-travelled Hellespont. And in distant time to come,
a rower on the benches on the wine-dark sea
shall turn to the next, and say : 'That was a man who died a long
time ago, killed in battle by the illustrious Hector.'

This they will say. And my fame will never die away."

So he spoke, and the Achaeans before him sat in silence,
ashamed that no one had arisen to meet Hector's challenge;
for they feared him, the best of the Trojan warriors. Finally,
Menelaus stood up and addressed his reluctant warriors,
chastising them with harsh words of anger; and uneasy groans
rushed through his battle-lines as he spoke out, saying :

" ὦ μοι ! What am I looking at? You arrogant men are men
no more, but the women of Achaea! This shame upon you
is a preposterous horror which I never thought I'd live
to see. Not one of us goes forth to face the sneering Hector?
May all you good-for-nothings rot back into dust and water
while you sit there as if already dead, you spiritless
cowards! Is that how it is? So be it! I will fight him myself.
Bring me my arms and armour, anyone! You can all watch me
fight, you insufferably moaning weaklings! You, and all the
Immortal gods, can watch me bring this war to its conclusion!"

Thus spoke Menelaus. So his army watched as he put on his armour. But Menelaus knew very little about the Immortal gods, for he was ready to walk to his death unwittingly, since Hector was the far stronger and better fighter of the two. So it was that “preposterous” army you mocked, O Menelaus, who saved your life, when its leaders rose up and laid hands on you and forcibly held you back.

So Agamemnon king of men gently took his brother’s hand, and said :

“You’ve gone mad, my brother, and the words you speak seem not your own. Beloved of Zeus, restrain yourself—however angry, and perhaps rightfully so—and think for a moment. Many a man of our army shudders to think of facing Hector. Even Achilles hesitates to fight him, though glory everlasting awaits the winner; and you well know that he is a far better fighter than you. Please, my brother, sit down with the army. We shall work this out; one of us will soon rise to fight—and once he starts, he’ll fight not so much to win, but to stop, and to bend his knees to the ground in welcome weariness.”

Thus did Agamemnon successfully change his brother’s mind, for what he said was reasonable. So Menelaus had his attendants remove his armour from his shoulders, and all the while he said not a word as they did so.

Then Nestor stood, and spoke in exasperation :

“ὦ πόποι ! I see bad times for our

beloved Achaea, which ails in weakness!
 I hear the great warrior Peleus, horse-breaker,
 mighty king of the Myrmidons, and the father
 of our own powerful Achilles, groan, groan, groan!

I once enjoyed the honour of visiting his home,
 and I recall him—a most excellent speaker, artist
 of thought—smiling most pleasurably as we
 spoke of the birth and lineage of the Argives.

What if Peleus saw us cringing before Hector?
 He would demand of the Immortals to rip his heart
 from his chest and fling him down to Hades!”

All this Nestor said, then continued for a time :

“O Zeus Father! Athena and Apollo! If you
 would only give me back my youth! Just one more time,
 the time the Pylians and fierce Arcadians
 fought at the walls of Pheia, clashing between two rivers,
 the rushing Celadon and the many streams of Iardanus.
 The Arcadians sent forward terrifying,
 tremendous warrior Ereuthalion, whose
 shoulders wore the armour of King Areithoüs,
 δῖος Areithoüs, whom they called the ‘mace-man’,
 because you never saw him fight with bow or spear,
 but with a battle-mace of iron that broke whole lines.

Listen now how Lycurgus overmastered Areithoüs,
 through trickery and not through strength, and took
 his armour from his body. In the heavy fighting,

the clever Lycurgus drew Areithoüs in-
 to a narrow corridor of rock, which baffled
 the swing of the mace. So, as Areithoüs tried to attack,
 Lycurgus slipped a sharp spear through his middle,
 and down fell the king on his back upon the earth.”

All this Nestor said, then continued :

“So Lycurgus stole all his armour, and wore it
 against the enemy in all of his battles ever
 after; and, when he grew old in his halls, he gave
 the armour to his attendant Ereuthalion
 to wear; and in this armour he overmastered
 many a great man—but not me.

There were many among me

lacking courage to meet that champion, but shuddered
 instead, and cringed in dread. But I had the courage,
 for I was young and strong and let loose in war to
 go wild. Courage! I loved the boldness of it,
 the audacity! And of all those warriors
 I was the youngest! So I fought him, and Athena
 gave me the glory of victory. He was the largest
 and most powerful man I ever killed. Stretched
 out this way and that on the earth he looked massive,
 like an island sprawling on the waves. If only
 I had my youth back just one more time, with the strength
 I had, then one of us would soon come face to face
 with Hector ‘of the glinting helmet’! But the rest
 of you, the best of the Achaeans, sit careless
 of the challenge. Perhaps the glinting helmet scares you?”

All this Nestor said angrily, and nine men stood up.
 First to rise was king of men Agamemnon,
 then rose the son of Tydeus, mighty Diomedes,
 then the Aiantes, radiating monumental strength,
 and then Idomeneus, and Idomeneus'
 attendant Meriones the bloodthirsty one,
 and after them Eurypylus, valiant son
 of Euaemon, and also the son of Thoas leapt
 to his feet, Andraemon, and δῖος Odysseus :
 and each man was ready to fight Hector.

Thus Nestor spoke :

“We will shake stones in a helmet and leave the choice
 to destiny. Our man will bring to the Achaeans
 an inestimable advantage, and to himself
 the greatest of glory, if he survives.”

So he spoke, and each man marked his stone with a sign,
 then tossed it into the helmet Agamemnon
 held out. And the army raised their hands to heaven
 in prayer, and one would say to the wide blue sky :

*“Zeus Father, may it be Ajax’s stone that falls
 from the helmet, or Diomedes’;—or else
 Menelaus’, king of golden Mycene.”*

This they would say. Meanwhile, Nestor shook the stones
 in the helmet, and let one spill randomly out on the earth.

A minister took the stone between his fingers
 and went through the line of warriors, displaying it,
 left to right, for each leader to see; but each man
 who saw the stone shook his head. But when he had brought
 the stone all the way down the line, the man who had
 scratched on it and tossed it in the helmet now held
 out his hand, the famous Ajax; so the minister
 came close and gave him the stone. And Ajax smiled
 to see his sign etched upon the stone, then flung it
 in the dust, and spoke :

“Friends,” he said, “I am the one, and am happy to hear it,
 for I expect to tear ‘ δῖος ’ Hector limb from limb. So come now!
 Pray to Zeus—but in silence, where each man stands, so
 the Trojans will not hear your appeal. On the other hand,
 let them hear, since we fear no one living. No man,
 through his strength, even through strength made stronger
 by experience, will force me backwards against my will.
 I shall show them the force of the fighter from Salamis.”

Thus spoke Ajax, who then prayed to Zeus; while one
 or another man would say to the wide blue sky :

*“Zeus Father, atop the peak of Ida most powerful,
 hear this prayer, and give victory to Ajax! Raise him
 to everlasting greatness! But if you favour Hector
 —at least allow them to contend with equal strength.”*

This they said while Ajax got into his shining armour.
 Then, with bronze-plate protecting his body, he strode
 confidently to the head of the battle-lines,

reminding his men of the terror of Ἄρης ,
 when the war-god comes to fight among warriors
 whom Zeus Orderer has joined in man-destroying
 combat, to test them, to see if they'll stand their ground.
 Ajax conjured such a terror, this huge defence
 of the Achaeans, while he smiled and entered
 into the gap between the two armies; and his
 long spear cast a deathly shadow onto the earth.

And the Argives rejoiced to see their man there, but
 a terrible trembling quivered through the Trojan ranks;
 even the heart of Hector knocked inside his chest.
 But there could be no turning back for him, for it
 was he who had invited this huge man eager
 for combat, now standing facing the Trojan lines.

Ajax had come near, and the Trojans admired
 the immensity of his shield, thick as Troy's wall,
 seven layers of ox-hide dried and sewn together,
 then reinforced with a top-layer of metal
 nailed in, the hand-work of the master armourer
 Tychius, greatest of all artists of leather,
 who lived in Hyle, and who had used for all seven
 layers the shiny hides of the mightiest bulls,
 then drove in over them the eighth layer of bronze.

This colossal shield Ajax now held before him,
 while he stood exceedingly close to Hector.
 Finally, Telamonian Ajax spoke, threateningly :

"Trojan, I have 'come forward to fight against Hector'.

Now you shall see, man to man, of the might of the Danaans.
 Even without army-breaker Achilles, who,
 though lion-like, lazes indifferent by his ships,
 giving Agamemnon the full edge of his rage.
 But many another of us are willing to fight you.
 So start with me when you will."

And Hector answered him :

"Ajax," he said, "son of Telamon, a leader
 of your army. Don't use feeble words to scare me,
 as to some little boy innocent of the works
 of war. You're not the only one experienced
 in the slaughter of men. You see I have a shield,
 too, and I, too, can move it left or right, and catch
 the blow with its tough ox-hide. You walked up to me
 because you may have seen me charging into close
 combat that Ἄρης enjoys to watch; I cared not
 for the chariots rushing past me, with their spears.
 And have no fear, Ajax : I don't need trickery
 to overmaster you. Openly I shall win."

With these words Hector drew back his death-bringing spear
 and let fly : and the sharp bronze point struck Ajax's shield
 and pierced its outermost metal and drove through six
 layers of the shiny bulls' hides, only to be stopped
 by the seventh, the final defence. Now Ajax,
 with the enemy spear sticking out insolently
 from his heavy cover, let fly his own killing
 spear, and its shadow crossed the gap quicker than sight;
 and Hector felt his perfectly round shield shudder

from a direct hit. The spear-point tore through its layers,
 then on through his breast-plate, forcing its way forward
 toward his rib-cage, with only his tunic as defence
 now from death. But as quick as a shadow Hector
 knocked the spear off its path, and away; so the son
 of Priam escaped a terrible fate.

Then each came forward, reached out, and tore out his spear
 from the other's shield; then quickly retreated, as lions
 or wild boars eye their raw prey, confident in their strength,
 and not easily exhausted.

Hector then punched his spear squarely in the middle
 of Ajax's shield, but its hard spear-point bent sidewise
 and useless; and Ajax leapt forward, tossing up
 his spear and catching it by the spike; the Argive
 hero jumped upon Hector and made him step back,
 and Ajax swiped his spear-tip along Hector's neck,
 and breathed contemptuous fury into his face,
 and saw the dark blood appear along Hector's throat.

But the wound was only a graze, and δῖος Hector,
 feeling the blood on his neck, struggled himself free
 from Ajax; and, rolling along the dust of the plain,
 he picked up a large jagged rock, and threw it straight
 at Ajax, who raised his shield to ward off the blow,
 and the rock made the bronze covering of his shield
 ring all over with violent reverberation.

So Ajax flung his shield aside, and he lifted up
 high, with both hands outstretched, a far larger stone;

then with one hand he swung it round and sent it off
 with immeasurable strength. And it smashed into
 Hector's shield, and caved it in, as a millstone crushes
 the husk of the grain; and Hector fell to his knees,
 surprised by the heavy weight of the stone on him;
 and he went down onto his back under his collapsed shield.

But Apollo, watching from the oak, swept in and raised Hector
 to his feet at once.

Now both men eyed each other, breathing evenly
 in and out, with concentration so fierce that neither
 saw night falling round them. Each readied to draw sword
 in close fight, and wound the other : but between them
 two men rushed in to pause this trial of skill, one
 from the Trojan lines and one from the Achaean,
 the ministers Talthylus and Idaeus,
 both surpassing wise. Raising their staffs before them,
 their symbol of office and law, they came to stand
 between the two combatants; and wise Idaeus,
 Priam's personal attendant, spoke out to all :

"No more fighting, my sons! Clearly you both are loved
 by Zeus! You warriors have been blessed with power
 our imagination can scarcely contain, yet
 all here saw it. But now look yourselves—it is already night,
 and all men must follow, for the time, what is right."

And Ajax answered :

"Idaeus, allow Hector to decide what is right.

It was he who invited the best of us to step forward
and fight. He speaks first, and I shall follow his word.”

So Hector answered him :

“Ajax, the gods have indeed given you greatness,
in stature, in quality, and in degree; your strength
is wondrous, and your every move precisely right.
I say you are far the best of the Achaeans.

So let us follow right, and cease this fight for now;
for it is already night; and we will meet again.

I wish you well, and that you have rest by your ships
among your people—and especially among
your friends and fellow warriors.

I will go inside the city. I go to join
the Trojan men and Trojan women together
praying to the gods.

But first allow me to gift you a remembrance,
so that hereafter both Achaean and Trojan
will say : ‘The two men fought a ferocious battle,
yet parted as friends.’”

So spoke Hector, and handed to δῖος Ajax
his sword with carven silver handle, in its sheath,
and his entire sword-belt, a well-cut piece of leather.
And Ajax gave Hector his own sword-belt, dyed bright
crimson. Then each went his way, one to the Achaeans,

the other into the army of the Trojans,
 who cheered loudly to see their leader still alive
 and well, walking away from the invincible
 hands of insurmountable Ajax; so they led
 Hector into the city as they might a god,
 for they could scarcely believe he was safe and sound.

On the other side of the battlefield, meanwhile,
 Ajax strode through the ranks, pleased with his victory;
 and was brought before the tent of Agamemnon,
 supreme commander of the Achaean forces.
 Son of Atreus led Ajax inside, then gave word
 to begin the night's feast. So the servants slaughtered
 a robust bull, in sacrifice to Zeus, who sits
 above the supremacy of men, and decides
 all outcomes. They flayed the body, then prepared it;
 and cut it into large pieces, which they skilfully
 roasted on spits, then drew off and served; and the feast
 began. And Agamemnon requested Ajax's
 plate, and himself placed there the portion of honour,
 the weighty prime rib roast, generously marbled
 and tender.

Now while each man ate his due serving, Nestor
 gave counsel to his commander, who always heard
 his word first, and with favour. So Nestor, sitting
 beside Agamemnon, leaned close, and spoke, saying :

"Son of Atreus, many of us lie dead out there,
 fallen by Ἄρης' spear, and their souls now collect
 down at Hades gate. So, when dawn comes, it were best

not to start any fight, but to gather the dead.

We'll cart them out with oxen and mules, and burn them some way from the camp. As for the ashes, the men can do as they wish. Some may choose to keep them, to bring them back home, whenever that may be. But for all others, let us build a single pyre, then raise up over it a single tomb for all."

So spoke Nestor, who continued :

"Which reminds me," he said. "If we're meant to stay here for a drawn-out time, then we should very quickly raise up a high wall, to defend ourselves and our ships. We must ensure its gates are built precisely, so they can be firmly sealed. And we have another option open to us : we can dig a deep trench beyond the wall, to stop their chariots and foot-forces; or at least slow them down for a time, for the royal, god-faring, gift-giving Trojans are not without ingenuity in the fight."

So spoke Nestor. And Agamemnon, sitting with Ajax to one side, and Nestor on the other, nodded, but said not a word in answer.

The ingenious Trojans, meanwhile, were gathered together in the heart of their walled city, sitting at supper within the doors of the king's palace, luminous as the moon aspiring in the sky; and the words exchanged between royal Priam's sons were stormy and contentious.

And over the din of voices Antenor called
for silence. He then began to speak, angrily :

“Hear me now!—all good Trojans, all Dardanians
and all our noble allies—that I may tell you
what my heart cannot keep silent. The price of Helen’s
beauty is too steep for us; who would willingly buy
bitterness and sorrow? Come now! and let us be
sensible! We will hand Helen to Atreus’ sons
and they will take her away. Do we not all know
that we now fight in violation of our oath,
our solemn promise taken in sight and ear of God.
Where do you think that wilful error will lead us?
I say we shall come to no good unless we do as I say.”

Thus spoke Antenor, then sat down. Then Alexandros stood up,
husband to ethereal Helen. He spoke just as hotly,
though with such a smooth and even composure, that one
might think him peaceful.

“Antenor,” he said, “your language grates on my ears;
surely you have a more agreeable manner
of expression. But if I understand you right,
I would think the gods have taken more than your speech
from you; I would think you have lost your mind. One cannot
do what one cannot do : I will not give up my wife.

You hear me speak as plain as you? I will continue—
and all of you, please, hear these words : I am willing
to give over everything else I brought with me

on my ships back from Argos. I also propose
an addition, contributed from my own personal wealth.”

So spoke Alexandros, then sat down. Then the king
rose before them, old Priam, and he delivered
his royal decision, speaking calmly :

“Hear me, Trojans, Dardanians, and our allies.
Tonight we sit and eat at peace, but, after this,
stay on your guard all the night through; we know very
well now that these Achaeans are not artless men.
One man alone could slip into the city and bring
terror. So we shall stay alert all the night through.

Meanwhile, Idaeus shall go down to their ships,
and deliver to Menelaus and Agamemnon
the word that noble Alexandros has just spoken.
(He who began this war has no care to end it
gently.) Idaeus shall also ask of Atreus’
sons if they wish to cease their belligerence till
they have removed their dead from the field, and burned them.

Thereafter, we will fight; and God will distinguish
between us, and grant one of us the victory.”

So spoke Priam, king of the Trojans, and all heard
and obeyed.

While the Trojan army continued with their evening meal,
the minister Idaeus left the assembly and Troy’s
walls, and crossed the bloody Scamander plain under the starlight.

When he came to the army of the Achaeans, he was brought before Agamemnon and the best of his men, assembled beside the king's own prodigious ship. Idaeus then conveyed Priam's message, saying, with everyone listening to him :

"Son of Atreus, and all excellent Achaeans,
Priam my king, along with his noble Trojans,
have requested of me to make known to you, if
you are inclined to hear, the word of Alexandros,
for whose sake all this contention has come to be.

Alexandros is willing to deliver to you
all the treasure he took on his ships from Argos,
when he safely (as the gods willed it) crossed the sea,
and came back here to Troy; and wishes to enlarge
this with a portion of his own personal wealth.

But the wedded wife of noble Menelaus :
Alexandros says he will not give her over,
though the Trojans favour this alternative.

My king has also requested of me to ask
if you wish to cease the fight until the bodies
are taken from the plain and burned. Following that,
we will fight until God gives victory to one of us."

So spoke minister Idaeus of the Trojans;
and in response all the Achaeans sat in silence.

After a time, mighty Diomedes spoke :

“We shall receive nothing from Alexandros, not even Helen.
It is plain, even to one who has lost his mind,
that all we need to do is tighten the noose we have round Troy.”

Thus spoke Diomedes, and all the Achaeans shouted out
in applause.

Then Agamemnon remarked to Idaeus :

“Idaeus, you hear the word of the Achaeans :
that is their answer to Alexandros, and it
is agreeable to me. As for the dead,
I have no objection to the Trojans burning
their bodies to ash. All men living should bring peace
to the dead quickly, and must not fail, for dead
souls go under the earth to gods. To this treaty
let Zeus be our witness. Let us not fail in this.”

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and lifted his sceptre to Zeus.

So minister Idaeus left the assembly,
and crossed the Scamander plain under the starlight,
and returned to Priam and the Trojans at their evening meal;
and Idaeus delivered Agamemnon’s message to Priam.
Then the Trojans, and the Dardanians, and everybody
now knew where they stood, that the battle for Troy would continue.

So, before dawn, in the hesitation between light and dark,
when shining Helios is hazy still under Oceanus' current,
rising up from the deep toward the mildly rippling surface :
the two armies met on the plain, and buried their dead.

In the near-dark one man could barely distinguish
the man next to him, and the remains of many dead
were likewise obscure, even when splashed with water
to wash the blood away. As it was, the bodies
were lifted onto the carts by men shedding hot tears.

Now Priam had sent word that he would not allow
any sound of lament from his men, to match
the Achaeans, who were apparently well-schooled
in silent movement. So in silence the dead were
piled in a heap and burned indiscriminately.
Then the Trojans, their hearts seething with grief, returned
within the city walls.

In like manner, the Argives gathered their dead, and firewood,
and piled the corpses in a heap, and burned them,
then returned to their ships.

Thus, on the Scamander plain, for years to come, stood a grave
for the unmarked Achaean dead, a high-raised mound of stones.

So, when the sun was high over the plain and surrounding fields,
burning in the broad blue sky, the Achaeans were well-advanced
on a high wall, raised as protection for themselves and their ships.
And the gates they built, for their chariots, were perfectly made,
and fitted together tightly, safely. And hard-by the wall
they dug a trench, deep and wide, and stuck a palisade of stakes in it.

Thus the Argives busied themselves tirelessly with their tasks.

Then Poseidon Earthshaker bent to the ear of Zeus Father,
the sky-minded master who moves the stars and lets all things be;
and while the gods gazed down upon the sparkling Achaean
army at work, Earthshaker remarked to his mighty brother :

“What is this that these mortals do, assembling such lofty
projects on the woefully limited ball of earth? With such
works appearing, will any man ever again feel awe for gods,
and the immeasurable works that we alone can produce?

Look at these long-haired Achaeans and that wall they’ve raised with speed
to match the gods—so they might think. Yes, they think they protect
themselves and their ships with such a lofty wall. I don’t think so,
however. In fact, I know so. And admire that ditch with stakes
in it! These men truly think much of themselves; or, if I’m kind,
let’s say they think they make the best of their capabilities.

Meanwhile, during all of this marvellous work, they fail
to sacrifice to us. Where is our due and proper hecatomb?
You see they cease to think of us while raising their own works.

Furthermore, such a grandiosity will be spoken of
all over that pathetic ball of earth, though it’s just a wall;
and men will forget *our* wall, the wall that Apollo and I
built around Troy for the hero Laomedon. It was the wall
that allowed for everything inside to arise, for Troy to be
as it is! It makes me shake to see the Achaeans attempt
to outdo us.”

And Zeus answered :

“ὦ πόποι ! My brother, whom all everywhere know as ‘Earthshaker’,
 worries himself with a wall? Perhaps some solitary spirit
 somewhere might concern itself with a wall, say, a water nymph
 without power to build to such a height, though the will be strong.
 And Earthshaker, known everywhere, is worried about his fame?
 Your name is as the Dawn spreads, wholly over the earth. So enough
 of this. When those ‘long-haired Achaeans’ go back to their homeland,
 simply send the salt sea up and demolish it. Their effort
 will be buried in obscurity, and lost, and forgotten,
 and your wall will be celebrated to your satisfaction.”

In just this way the two gods spoke on Olympus.

Beneath them, Helios burned, and men went to and fro. Later,
 when both armies sat at supper, Priam and Agamemnon
 both heard a rumbling sound from afar, Zeus’ thunder. So
 each man held out his cup, and each man poured out some drops of wine,
 contemplating the powerful son of Cronos. Then, thinking
 of tomorrow’s work, all went to their rest, and received the gift
 of god-given sleep.

End of Bk VII

Book VIII

Zeus, then, Long-Watcher, looked down through starlight at the Trojan
and Achaean armies occupying the Scamander plain,
one in their walled city, the other at their ships by the sea.
Contemplating from Olympus, he spoke to the gods at his side :

“Hear me,” he said, “particularly you lionesses among us,
that I may tell you my word. From this time, no goddess, nor god,
shall cut through my intentions, and attempt to unknot my plan.
Let Destiny come to be as it is, without your effort.

So any god or goddess I see aiding one side or the other
will feel the sharp push of my lightning bolt, knocking him, or her,
down to the abyss of Tartarus, there to hang in darkness
without depth, as far from our sight as tip to toe, Olympus
to Tartarus. You shall dangle, ankle-tight, from a bronze cord.
There you’ll have time to contemplate the power of your father.

I do not invite you to try me. Do not seek to confirm
my words. A cord of well-twisted bronze hanging from the black air :
you’ll think, by tugging on it, you’ll loosen its suspension.
Do not try me, or you will learn the power of your father.

Especially when I snip it myself and you end up washed up
at my feet from the sea, salty with Poseidon’s brine,
and sodden with sorrow for your woeful misunderstanding.”

Thus spoke Zeus, and received no answer from the gods around him,
who marvelled at his uncompromising words. But, finally,
the bright-eyed goddess Athena spoke out, and said :

“O Father, son of Cronos, supremest master, who rules Time
and all in it, we know well of the power of the highest,
and we respect it.

That said, I pity the Danaans, and would not have them lost
at the end. That is how it is with me. However, I, for one,
will keep back from the bloody part of war, as you ask of us.

But may I benefit the Danaans with recommendations?
My friendship will be a welcome balance to your hate; and my
counsel might save them from your unjustifiable bias,
which may bring them a heated lightning strike.”

So spoke Athena. Father Zeus smiled at that, and answered her :

“Be happy, sweet daughter. In truth I am not interested
in any of this. You know I’m always generous with you.”

So spoke Zeus; and his daughter smiled back.

Zeus then left the convocation of gods. To leave Olympus,
the All-Powerful required no golden chariot pulled
by horses of galloping bronze hoofs, trappings that lesser gods
might require for transit; for Zeus was already everywhere,
and adjusting his concentration took him first here, or there.
Just now, atop Gargarus, Ida’s highest peak, incense flared,
its end seething red by the altar standing in his sacred
grove of oak. The priests had retired for rest; here, thus, Zeus sat
in fragrant solitude, in blessed silence under the stars.
O Zeus, never was there a god who felt himself so alone.

He glanced at the Trojans' mazy city, and the Achaeans
by their ships, as Dawn spread herself over the Scamander plain.

Down below, the steadfast Achaeans ate their early meal in haste
down by their huts, preparing for another day of battle.

Then without a pause they went from their breakfast to their armour,
fitting their gleaming breastplates, and sharpening their spears and swords;
and very quickly were ready for combat. Likewise the Trojans,
across the way, prepared themselves for war. Throughout the city
the warriors knew their numbers were far fewer now, yet still
they were eager to meet the enemy up close, for they had
no choice—they must protect the women and children of Troy.

So all the gates of the city swung open, and the Trojan
army moved onto the plain, both foot-forces and chariots :
and the noise they raised was deafening.

And both armies met at a spot on the plain and batted their
shields each upon each; and spears crossed the air back and forth; and sharp
sword-edges scuffed and scraped together; and the noise intensified
to an intolerable volume, yet it motivated
all warriors to force yet louder sound. Cries of grief and shouts
of triumph mixed in the tumult, and the soil ran with blood.

For as long as the morning grew brighter and hotter, so long
did the long spears and stones fly to and fro, and warriors kept
falling. Death-bringing weapons kept hitting their mark. At high noon,
when Helios burned at his height, evenly lighting up the air,
Zeus raised, for all gods to see it, the very weighing scales
themselves : and there would be one golden plate for the Trojans, and
one golden plate for the Achaeans. On both he placed black fate.

And all gods that lived in earth and sky saw the Achaean plate
 lower on its chains until the imbalance was complete : down
 to a day of destiny had the Achaeans fallen, a fate
 they wouldn't anticipate—to keep the Achaeans keen, as
 it would ultimately turn out. So Zeus thundered from Ida's
 highest peak, and for a quick flash his lightning burned on the plain
 hotter than the sun, and the Achaean army saw, and feared.

At noon the Trojan warriors overpowered the Achaeans,
 repulsing them with brutal punishment, and pushed them backwards
 toward their ships, away from the city. Their resistance surprised
 Idomeneus; and Agamemnon; and the Ajaxes,
 both the lesser and the greater fighter; for all of these men
 were experienced in the ways of Ἄρης , god of destruction;
 yet not one stood his ground, but he fell back, and kept doing so.
 Nestor alone held position and fought the overwhelming
 Trojan onslaught, as a standard for all Achaeans to follow;
 in truth he stood firm because his chariot was disabled.
 Old man Nestor had brought with him a third horse, bound with two ropes
 to the crossbar, where his two other horses were yoked beside it.
 It was this horse that was struck by an arrow sent by Paris,
 husband to lovely-haired Helen : so the pain-bringing arrow
 flew through the horse's head where his flowing mane's first hairs grew out,
 and entered his brain, a fatal place. So the horse leapt up here
 and there in pain, and shook about with the arrow fixed in his head,
 and his companion horses and chariot were thrown into confusion
 as he lurched and staggered by the bronze yoke. And as the old man
 drew his sword and hacked at the bucking horse's two ropes, Hector
 came galloping in swiftly, confidently, two spears in hand,
 the chariot of Hector himself. And death would have taken
 the old man away then and there, had not Diomedes seen,

just as the warrior was shouting loudly to Odysseus :

“Zeus-born! Why have you turned round with the rest, with shields on their backs?
Away with you! And take care of yourself, so that an arrow
doesn’t prick a shoulder!”

So shouted Diomedes, who then continued :

“No! Odysseus! Come back! This goddamn Hector’s on Nestor!
Help me fight him back!”

So he shouted, but Odysseus heard none of it in the
fighting, as he kept stepping back toward the ships as the Trojans
came on. So Diomedes turned away, and saw himself alone
among the foremost fighters, as all his fellow warriors
were behind him. So he fought his way to Nestor’s agitated
chariot, and he shouted out again, this time to the old man :

“Come with me!” he said. “Your chariot is upset! Your horses
are slow anyway. Come onto my chariot and see what
Trojan horses can do. These two were Aeneas’. You can
tell me if you’ve ever seen faster horses. Come on here and
we’ll face Hector together. Worry about your horses later.”

So Diomedes spoke, as he hefted Nestor beside him.

Then he said to the old man :

“Take the reins and I’ll send Hector a keepsake : two Achaean spears.”

This he said, while Nestor’s attendants jumped onto the old man’s

chariot, Sthenelus and mighty Eurymedon. They cut loose the chaotic, stricken trace-horse; then rode off.

Nestor, meanwhile, took the reins from Diomedes, and cracked the whip over the horses; so they shot forward towards Hector, who charged fearlessly head-on into their range, δῖος Hector, moving quick as lightning. Diomedes let fly, yet missed him, but his spear stuck straight through the chest of the driver beside him, Eniopeus, Thebaeus's son, a young man of good humour : the reins fell from his hands as he fell out of the chariot, and Nestor's horses swerved round his body and kept on towards Hector, and Eniopeus, sprawled on the earth, gave up his strength, and his life. And Hector, as he took his fast-galloping horses in hand, felt anguish cloud over him at the loss of his friend, and he veered off and away, but not to return to the body; he required a daring charioteer, and found one quickly : fearless Archeptolemus, son of Iphitus, precisely the man Hector wanted. So Hector shouted for the driver, who jumped onto the chariot; and Hector gave him the reins.

Then a terrible thought blazed through the entire Achaean army : they were penned up like sheep beside the city of Troy, and ruin was at hand, and they were helpless to stop it coming : there were no movements available to evade the irreparable death coming for them.

It was then that the Father of God and Men thundered again, and let fly a dazzling electric bolt of many-forked lightning : and its coruscating point cracked the earth before the horses of Diomedes. The two horses came to a sliding stop, and in terror turned toward their chariot and cowered there.

And all the warriors smelled the fiery sulphur in the air.

Nestor let the reins slip from his hands, his body stiff with fear;
and he spoke to Diomedes, saying :

“Diomedes, everybody got the message, I think. Today
is not to be our day of victory. In fact, we must retreat.
Is not that the meaning of the light that came only from Zeus?
Our supremacy will come another time. Fighting on, now,
would be senseless for us. We cannot overcome the will of Zeus.”

And Diomedes answered :

“No doubt you speak right, most worthy sir, we all indeed saw that.
Yet to think of retreat leaves me conflicted. Zeus has spoken,
I accept that, yet I already hear Hector himself speaking,
saying in assemblies, ‘Tydeus’ son! Put to flight
to his ships!’ He will declare this loudly. I’d rather be dead.”

And in answer to this Nestor said :

“ ὦ μοι ! These are the words of Tydeus’ son?
Let Hector declare, loud enough for Olympus
to shake, that Diomedes is a womanly
coward, and weak! No Trojan, Dardanian,
nor anyone will hear such rubbish with belief!
Especially the wives of all the powerful
husbands you’ve slaughtered, and left worthless in the dust.”

So spoke Nestor, who turned their horses round to flee

back to the ships through the chaotic Achaean
 retreat. And the oncoming Trojan army let
 out a great battle-cry, and redoubled the strength
 of their push, sending a shower of stones and spears
 at the backs of the withdrawing Achaean men.

And Hector came on strong at them with his new charioteer;
 and fast on their heels he shouted out for Diomedes to hear :

“What a backside has Tydeus’ son! Where are you running?
 Back to your throne of honour? Look! The Danaans rush quickly
 to prepare your supper, and fill your drinking cup! But now they’ll
 laugh and laugh and sit you with the serving women! Go on, you
 little girl’s toy, run away! The sight of you sickens my eyes!
 Go on! Troy’s walls are too high for women to climb! You’re eager
 to carry our wives away? Before that I shall cut you dead!
 And you’ll have all of forever to wonder over your weakness!”

So shouted mighty Hector, and the son of Tydeus groaned;
 and he fought the half of his mind that bid him turn his horses
 round and fight the bastard head-on. Three times he almost turned about,
 and each time Zeus from Ida thundered, stinging Diomedes’
 heart. And the Trojans heard the thunder as a rallying cry,
 and δῖος Hector shouted again, this time to his own men :

“Onward, Trojans! Keep after them, friends! Fight with frenzy, and think
 only of victory! Zeus promises us triumph and glory—
 and for our enemy, death! Look! They rush to cower behind
 their silly wall, their grand build beneath our regard! But they can’t
 keep us back! We’re too strong, and our horses will easily leap
 their worthless ditch! When my fury breaks through their wall, you will see

a fire to rival the lightning, when all their ships go up
in flames—from my own hand! And in the smoke of the destruction
one by one I will cut them down beside the confining sea!”

So he said, then shouted to his horses, saying :

“Xanthus! And you, good Lampus! Repay me now for all the care
beautiful Andromache shows you! For all the honey-sweet wheat
and the water, all for you to eat and drink to cheer your hearts!
All that she gives you even before she serves her dear husband!”

So he shouted out, then spoke quieter, to himself, saying :

*“Come on! Faster, my friends! We must pluck Nestor’s shield off his old
bones! His famous shield all of solid gold—even the goddamn
handles! And before I’m done I’ll strip Diomedes of that
elaborate breast-plate of his, known as Hephaestus’ hand-work.
Kill both of these men, and the Achaeans this very night will
beg to get the hell out of here.”*

So raging Hector prayed solemnly to himself; and Queen Hera,
hearing this, and watching her beloved Achaeans retreating
from combat, stirred on her lofty throne, and all Olympus shook
with her upset; and she turned to mighty Poseidon, and spoke :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Earthshaker, whom the whole world of men admires!
Can you not find in your heart even a particle of pity
for the Danaans, who are being crushed? We know it’s Zeus’
meddling that’s causing this silly repulse to happen to them.
My brother, if you have no care to show *me* any sympathy,
may you not think of *them* at least, and all their kindness to you,

and all those superb offerings they lower to your altars
 in Helice and Aegae, the cities of earth devoted,
 to a man, in worshipping your name? Also, I recall you
 once saying you preferred an Achaean victory. So then
 let us have an Achaean victory! All gods here who wish
 the Achaeans well, and the Trojans to die, let us react
 with the power that befits us, and force those horrible Trojans
 back! In doing this we'll irritate our 'all-powerful' Zeus,
 whose voice travels so far that nothing can escape it in peace.
 Let him watch *us* work. Perhaps our success will keep him silent
 while he sits off on his own, high on Ida, occupied
 with what he calls his 'loneliness'."

And in answer to this, Earthshaker Poseidon sat troubled,
 and said :

"Hera, I hear you hurling words about, but I'm trying not
 to hear them. You would prefer us to face off against mighty
 Zeus, Cronos' son? If *you* recall, he's the most powerful
 god of all. So I for one will stay out of this bit, and watch
 the war as a moment's entertainment."

Thus, in this way, they spoke one to another; and Queen Hera
 turned elaborately away from her brother with a frown.

Just now, down below, in the heat of their retreat,
 the Achaeans had muddled themselves into con-
 fusion, having bottlenecked the massive numbers
 of their army by the turbulent waves of the sea.
 Many men had made it past the Wall to their ships,
 where they were organising and rearming themselves :

but just as many still remained on the other side,
 caught between Wall and trench, unable to struggle
 past their own defences and make it through the gates
 to safety. So innumerable warriors and chariots
 and horses, cut off from escape for the moment,
 were crammed together in a crush to stop the breath,
 stuck in place with nowhere to move, but only to look
 round in panic, and wait for the congestion to ease :

And Hector, coming on with fury, eldest son of Priam
 of Troy, laughed to see these so-called 'sons of Ἄρης' crowded thick
 with turmoil and panic, their raised spears clashing together
 like branches in a wild wind : so had Zeus meant this rout to be.

διὸς Hector, with his fierce forces behind him, was hell-bent on
 watching the Argives go down in flames, eager to set ablaze
 all their ships and take away their one way of escape from Troy :
 all he needed was to get closer.

But Queen Hera was still watching. So she placed in Agamemnon's
 mind a will to rouse his warriors. The supreme commander,
 then, tore his sea-purple cloak from his shoulders and waved it round,
 calling all his leaders to an impromptu assembly.

These mighty warriors gathered by Odysseus' ship,
 his huge, black, wide-bellied sea-going vessel, with figurehead
 in shape of a terrible sea-monster, to strike fear in those
 who saw it. His ship stood in the centre of the arrangement
 of ships, with Ajax's at one end of the line, and Achilles'
 at the other, both equally far off; for both warriors
 from the start had trusted in the power of their hands and had

no thought of quick escape.

So Agamemnon, king of men, shouted at his warriors
with heated words :

“Shame on you, you despicable cowards! Everyone will say,
‘How strong those Argives looked, but how weak inside!’ We won’t hear it,
though, because we’ll all be dead! Where have all your grandiose boasts
gone? All those proclamations of ‘we’re the best’, ‘we’re the strongest’,
all that big talk in assembly back at Lemnos, when you
stuffed your faces with high-horned cattle and drank your overflowing
bowls of wine, pronouncing ridiculously that each of us
will take down one hundred, no, two hundred Trojans with our swords!
How eager you were then to stand up to the enemy and weigh
yourself one against another! And now you can’t even kill
one man, this Hector—who I’m sure is coming to burn our ships
to ash. Then where will we be? Other than sweating by a blaze
of ruin all the way down the line!

Zeus Father! Have you ever torn down a mighty king so low?
Have you ever stolen such sure victory out of his hands?

Warriors! Do I speak blindly, in bewilderment? Or do
I sound as strong as ever? Now what will you do about it?

Mighty Zeus! Did I pass even a single altar to your
greatness when my rowers brought me to this disastrous place?
Over and over I made sacrifice to you, honouring
your power with all the best pieces, with the savoury scent
of fat and the thigh-bones of bulls, praying to bring down the walls
of Troy. Zeus! I beg you to bring my plan to completion! At least

let us get out of here alive! Do not allow the Trojans
to destroy the Achaeans!"

Thus spoke Agamemnon, so enraged with weakness
that fiery tears stung the vessels of his eyes.

And Zeus Father, having allowed himself to hear this harangue,
nodded in sympathy, his sure sign that the prized Achaeans
would be saved, and remain in light, and not be lost, for Hades
to have and hold in oblivion for time immeasurable.

So Zeus Supreme, punisher and saviour both, from Ida's peak
dispatched an eagle to soar over the dusty air above
the field of battle, the clearest omen of all winged things.
And Agamemnon said not a word, nor did any of his
shamefaced leaders, while astonished they watched the eagle fly
on high with a fawn dangling loose and helpless in its claws.
This fawn was the swiftest of all the young of a mighty deer.
In speechless awe the Argives saw the eagle let its quarry
loose, and the young thing fell from the sky, a long and extensive
drop through the air down to smash against a beautiful altar,
the very one where the Argives often offered sacrifice
to Zeus, the incomparable author of divination.

And so it was that the Achaean warriors knew that Zeus
Father had sent this sign to them. So, without one more spoken
word, the leaders of men looked one to another, then gathered
their weapons into their fists, and went forth to fight the Trojans.

First among them was Tydeus' son Diomedes, who
drove his galloping horses towards the gates of their defences;

and the press of Achaean warriors bunched there opened a lane
 for him to pass by, then cheered loudly enough to fill the sky.
 And before the eyes of all he worked the reins, and his horses
 brought his chariot up into the air, and leapt over the trench;
 and on he rode into the Trojan lines to face off man to man :
 and swift as an omen fell Agelaus into the dust, son
 of Phradraon and a great Trojan warrior : but now he
 was dead : so the mistake he'd made would be his last. When he saw
 Diomedes coming, he'd wheeled his horses round to flee the
 terrifying fighter, whose face just then was as a Gorgon's :
 and for all his bright idea he got a sharp spear fixed between
 his shoulder-blades, and out it burst in a bloody mess through his
 chest : so Agelaus tumbled from his chariot, and his armour
 clattered against the careless earth.

This was the death that got the Argives moving with dominance.

And fast behind Diomedes came the sons of Atreus,
 Agamemnon and Menelaus : and fast after them the
 Aiantes, radiating fury : and after them Idomeneus :
 and then Meriones, famous killer of men and just now
 blood-thirsty : then Eurypylus came forward, Euaemon's son :
 and Odysseus slipped from one bit of cover to the next
 so no one saw him coming : thus the ninth man to advance in
 plain sight was Teucer, the man-killer brilliant with the bow.

Teucer lowered to one knee behind the huge shield held there by
 Ajax. So Ajax would hoist his shield aside, and Teucer would
 raise his curved bow. His quick eyes would spy his victim, and he'd shoot
 off his arrow, bringing death to the man, who would fall where he stood
 and surrender his life to Hades : thus would the Trojans yield

up another man. Then Teucer would draw back, as a child nestles by his mother, and Ajax's mighty arm would bring down the resplendent shield before the assassin, covering him in safety once more.

Which of the Trojans did Teucer icily pick off, one by one? Orsilochus first, and Ormenus, and Ophelestes, and Daetor, and Chromius, and the godlike Lycophontes, and Amopaon, Polyæmon's son, and Melanippus : all fell one after another in quick succession onto the silent earth. And Agamemnon relished the sight of his assassin dismantling the Trojan battle-lines, as arrow flew off upon arrow; so he came up to his man, and Ajax brought the huge, heavy shield down before them; and the king said :

"Teucer! My very man! Entirely Telamon's son! With every arrow driven home you bring your fellow men closer to victory! And a win for your father Telamon, though he be far off in island Salamis : you bring him glory. Let us win the battle first, then I'll put some gold in your hand, or horses if you like—and a golden chariot with them—or I'll give you a woman."

And assassin Teucer answered :

"Most honoured sir, currently I need no encouragement. However, the thought of a woman in my bed urges me to wrap this up faster, and give mighty Ajax's arm a rest. Honoured Ajax knows I haven't stopped shooting since you pushed us forward. While we pressure the enemy and force them

backwards to their city, I sit here on my knee
 nice and relaxed, and pick them off one by one.
 I scout the lines and at my leisure I choose.
 These arrows I've had made for me at my design :
 have you ever seen such length and cut in barbs? As
 far as they fly, they go in just as far—I don't
 shoot to wound; bringing maximum bleeding cheers me.
 Eight arrows now so far are stuck in eight dead Trojans.
 If the years I've taken from them could add to mine
 I'd live to two hundred. But sir, I used to say
 there was no one alive I couldn't hit, but this bastard
 Hector is a mad dog."

So he said as he set another arrow on his bow-string.
 He let fly straight at Hector, coolly resolute to kill him.
 But he missed : and could hardly believe it : but still his arrow
 found a target : it tore into the chest of Gorgythion,
 one of King Priam's noble and excellent sons, who now felt
 a well-barbed arrow fix in his exploded heart. His mother
 was gorgeous Castianeira, shapely as the goddesses,
 a daughter of a woman from Aesyme. Now the man's head sank
 to one side as a poppy leans from the dews and rains of spring
 in a rank garden : even so his head wearied under the weight
 of his helmet.

So Teucer set another arrow coolly on his bow-string,
 eager to kill Hector : and let fly straight at him : but he missed,
 for Apollo, far-reaching meddler, poked the flight sidewise.
 But the arrow hit fearless Archeptolemus, Hector's
 charioteer. As he drove his horses, the arrow stuck him
 in the chest. So he fell from the chariot-board, and his fast-

galloping horses ran looser and left their driver behind
 to die. Hector grit his teeth in angry sorrow as he took
 the reins himself; and even as he mourned his charioteer
 he sought a new one, and shouted to his half-brother
 Cebriones to come aboard and take the reins and drive
 the horses. And Cebriones leapt onto the chariot.

But Hector himself sprang past him, shouting a terrifying
 sound as he jumped to the dirt, where he reached
 for a stone and flung it at Teucer straight as an arrow,
 furious to kill him. And even as Teucer had Hector
 dead in his sight, and his arrow ready on the string, before
 he could pull back to maximum stretch, the rock smashed his shoulder
 at the collar-bone, at the knob by his neck, often a fatal
 place for a wound. Just there had Hector aimed for, and the jagged
 stone snapped the bow-string. So that was that for the bow,
 and Teucer dropped it; and himself went loose, and sank
 to the earth onto his knees, and lay there. Ajax,
 meanwhile, leapt in front of Teucer and brought his heavy
 shield down as cover. Then two good soldiers came running in,
 Mecisteus, son of Echius, and high-spirited Alastor,
 and carried Teucer, gnashing his teeth in pain, back to the ships.

But the Danaans' repulse would be a short one,
 for the Olympian high on Ida's icy peak
 peered down upon the clamorous plain, and aroused
 new fury in the Trojan warriors, for no
 further reason that Homer explicates : except
 to suggest that life is relentless in making
 its harrowing point. So the Trojans shoved back to
 the trench the shambles of the confused Achaeans,

whose motivated onset was cut short, to their
own great surprise. And δῖος Hector led the charge.

Just as a dog pursuing a lion
or wild swine attaches its sharp teeth
in the backside of the beast that turned round
to run, so Hector advanced on the long-haired
Achaeans, relentlessly cutting down, one after
another, all those muddled together at the hindmost;
and panic broke through any remnant of Achaean order.
They fled. Some men fell into the deep trench and fixed
themselves on the pointed stakes, and down slipped their trans-
fixed bodies to the earth, and when they met the dirt
they were dead. Others who'd made it through the deadly
stakes and trench were cut down before they reached the Wall.
So many Achaean warriors were killed by Trojan hands.

Now, back again by their ships, the Achaean leaders,
and all their men, raised their hands up to Zeus and prayed.

And furious Hector kept turning about all ways, his eyes
narrowed as his horses beat the soil with their hooves. His eyes
outdid Diomedes in ferocity : it were Hector's eyes
which blazed with the terror of the Gorgonian stare, his eyes
which fully possessed the fury of man-destroying Ἄρης .

Now, at the sight of those eyes, Queen Hera shifted in her seat
again, and looked down upon her beloved Achaeans
with pity. Then, Hera turned to Athena and spoke, saying :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Others are adamant to leave us out of it.

(You follow me, daughter of Zeus Orderer.) So shall we care no more for this war? and not watch any more Danaans die? We shall think of them no longer! Will this be the last time? Look at the overproportion of blood on our side! Now our Danaans shall fall in monotonous death, so many falling to a horrible doom because of one man! Hector! Priam's son. I have no care to tolerate this rage of his; he schools us in evil. Look at all that unbearable work!"

Then spoke the goddess Athena Bright-Eyes :

"This expensive rage of his is indeed overmuch. I would have him destroyed by Achaean hand beside his own walls in his homeland, but my father the Orderer rages indecently, yet unfortunately unwearyingly, and cruelly; and is relentlessly tricky in his ways to defeat my plans. I would call this ungrateful. Does he not remember how many times I kept his son alive, and brought him exhausted through the labours of Eurytheus? Throughout his work he would pray to keep his mind, so Zeus made me go down to secure his feet upright. If I had spent a moment to foresee this day, his son down in Hades, with his hands holding that hated-headed dog, would not have come safely step by step over the black River Styx. His head would have gone under."

And Hera replied :

"Soon enough Father will call you his Shining-Eyed One again."

And Athena continued :

“Shining, indeed—have our horses prepared for us.
I shall go down into the house of Zeus Orderer
and put on the armour of combat, and lift the weapons,
and you and I will go see how glad Hector is to meet us
between the lines of battle on the field. I say
Hector of the glinting helmet will be one more
Trojan satisfying the dogs and birds with his
fat and flesh, when he lay dead by the Argive ships.”

Thus spoke goddess Athena, breathing fury. Then the queen of heaven
bade the single-toed horses brought before her, their golden headgear
magnifying their intense beauty; and she moved to and fro
beside them, harnessing them, even the delicate-armed queen
herself, goddess who watches over girls, brides, flowers, and all
women : Hera now readied the horses to gallop into war.

And Athena Defender let her robe slip from her body
down to her father’s floor, and stepped out of its soft fabric,
leaving behind its astonishing embroidery from her
own hand. She put on instead Zeus Father’s powerful armour,
and readied for awful war. Then she rose onto her chariot
and took the spear into her hand, ready to obliterate
whole armies of men who irritate her, the daughter of a
mighty father.

Then Hera snapped the whip over the horses, and eagerly
they sprang like a crack of lightning onward : and in front of her
the gates of heaven, the passageway of dense, thick cloud, parted,
releasing a deep, prolonged rumbling thunder as they moved

aside to let them through.

So the horses galloped through the corridor of cloud,
spurred by the spark of the whip on their backs.

But Zeus Father saw them from Ida's tip, and grew angry :
a terrible anger. So he summoned Iris to go down
on golden wings to deliver a message. He said to her :

"Go quickly now, Iris, and turn them round.
And forbid them my presence. As you go,
I will tell you the substance of my Word."

So spoke Zeus; and Iris sprung forward, her feet
sinking step by step along the tops of billowy storm-clouds
as she moved along. And as she left behind the high mountains
of Ida she heard Zeus' Word in her mind :

"Remember, charming Iris," he said, "I don't want to see them.
They want war and I'd rather not humour them. So I will give
them a choice, and deliver to them the outcome in advance :

I will lame their horses and shatter their chariot. The two
goddesses shall fall through a darkness for ten years of sunrises :
their wounds from my one lightning-bolt shall take that long to heal.
Thus my Shining-Eyes will know what it is to fight her father.
Hera, however, I have no strong feeling for, no anger.
I am habituated to her continual contradiction."

Thus Zeus delivered his Word to Iris, who now stood before
the open gates of heaven, and saw the two goddesses come;

and she stopped them, and delivered her message. First, Iris said :

“Where are you going? Are you two mad? Zeus does not allow you to defend the Argives. He tells you to stay away, or else. Hear now what he has ordained as punishment for defiance.”

So Iris told them Zeus’ Word, then added :

“Zeus had one more word to say,” said Iris, “to most worthy queen Hera. He said, and I quote, ‘you horrid bitch, you think you’re strong enough to raise your hand against the mightiest god there is?’”

This Iris said to the queen, then on wind-fast feet fled the scene.

Then Hera turned to Athena and spoke, saying :

“Oh, Athena dearest! That preposterous father of yours!
So wrong-headed! So perverse! So misguided! So—corrupted!
Athena dear, I have decided that we shall no longer
fight others’ battles. Let those little people mingle like beasts
down below. So one lives, so one dies; let it be as it is.
Let *him* concern himself with Trojans and Argives, and pronounce
as many *Words* as he likes! Whatever is right—whatever
King God decides what is right (if that’s how he pleasures himself).”

Thus spoke Hera. So she turned the single-toed horses around
and returned to Olympus. There, the Horai, the goddesses
of air who direct the gates of heaven, unyoked the horses
for them, the ornamented horses of unearthly beauty,
and secured them in their ambrosial stalls, where they enjoyed there
sweet rest. The Horai then leaned the chariot against a wall

of the blindingly-bright vestibule of Heaven. Meanwhile, the two goddesses returned to the assembly high up on Olympus, and sat down on their thrones, each to one side of Zeus Father's throne; and each sat there burning with anger inside.

Zeus Father himself rose up from the summit of Ida Mount, on chariot wheels he let turn leisurely as he made his way up to the assembly of the gods on high Olympus. When he returned, his massive chariot was settled away by Poseidon Earthshaker, who, at the last, flung a spotless linen cloth over it. And All-Seeing Zeus sat on his throne. Huge Olympus quaked when his feet struck the floor.

So everyone

sat there silently. Neither Athena nor Hera addressed Zeus' Word. But Zeus knew, and he smiled inside, and spoke out :

"Athena, Hera, why these long faces? Surely you have no more interest in the affairs of men. Obliterating Trojans in battle becomes tedious, no? Men win their glory there, not gods. Now let's be serious. In all ways I'm invincible. All the gods in Olympus together cannot turn me. Both of you were quivering with fear before you even stood in battle, and done its terrible work. It shall be as I have foreseen it. Thus I tell you : your chariots would never have brought you back home to Olympus."

So he spoke, and Athena and Hera muttered, contriving new evils for the Trojans. Yet to her father Athena said not a word, but kept her anger inside. His wife Hera, however, could not hold back, and spoke out, saying :

“Must a wife hear such shocking words from her husband?

We all know what you are : the god not easily exhausted.

As it is, we pity the Achaeans warriors. Unlike us,
they have an end, and too many just now are being destroyed.
So, we will spare ourselves the dust of battle, just as you wish;
but we will place encouragement in the minds of our friends,
so that they may not all die because of your beastly hate.”

And to this from Hera, Zeus Cloud-Gatherer replied :

“You’ll have to ‘spare’ yourself that dust tomorrow, my ox-eyed queen,
when your ‘beastly’ husband punishes the Argives with the death
of many fine warriors. Watch, if you care to see my art
at work. Accept that Hector shall not cease from heavy killing
till Achilles is persuaded to rise from his spot by his ship,
to bring help to your precious Achaeans. First, however, all-
governing Destiny has to show its bright idea to rouse
Achilles. Till that happens, the Trojans shall push the fighting
right to the ships themselves, and the Achaeans shall struggle hard
to fight and survive in that narrow space. Know, my honoured queen,
you have yet to see the worst, if you care to see, and to ‘place
encouragement in the minds of our friends’. This is as it is
decreed of heaven. And I am Heaven. I am Destiny.

As for you, queen, I care not for your anger. I will watch you
drop to the lowest limits of bottomless Tartarus
under Hades. There you may dangle with Iapetus
and Cronos, and never again see the light of Helios,
never again feel even the slightest breath of air on you,
but only the darkness of horrible Tartarus—and I

won't lift a finger to help you. Or go off and away on
 your own, and wander wherever, to find whatever, to do
 who knows what—and I will not care one particle, you shameless,
 dog-faced simpleton.”

So spoke Zeus, and Hera gave no answer, and thus the gods sat.

Then the bright light of the sun sank back into Oceanus'
 waters, drawing behind it the cloak of dark night covering
 the grain-giving earth. Only reluctantly did the Trojans
 watch the light fail over the bloody plain; but with relief
 the Achaeans saw their three-times-prayed-for darkness come, to save
 them for another day. Thus, the armies split apart for the night.

Hector, then, most illustrious of Trojans, summoned the men
 to assemble beside the rushing river Scamander, away
 from the ships, in a clearing under the stars, where no corpses
 lay conspicuous in the darkness. This night neither army
 collected their dead. The Trojan warriors stepped down to earth
 from their chariots, and gathered to hear the Word of Hector.
 So the army's leader stuck his shining spear-point of gold
 in the dirt, and spoke out to the assembled warriors :

“Hear me, all Trojans, Dardanians, and Allies.
 We'd have brought an ending to the Achaeans
 this very day, I'm sure of it; we'd have killed them
 all and burned their ships, then gone back inside our Troy.
 But darkness has rushed in, to save the Argives from certain death,
 and their ships from flaming down to ash by the surf of the sea.

We shall obey the darkness, and prepare our evening meal.

Unyoke the horses and feed them. Meanwhile, choose men to go
 into the city to fetch back cattle and sheep, and fresh corn
 for the horses. Furthermore, have men gather as much firewood
 as they can carry, so that our fires will burn all night long
 as a second dawn rising to heaven. In this way we will see
 the Argives' movements. They may try to get the hell out of here.
 But they're mistaken if they think they'll board their ships with ease.
 We will not let them leave here without a struggle. Spear, arrow,
 stone, dart, footstool, whatever you have to throw at them, throw it,
 and give them a hurt to think on when they're sitting back at home,
 a scar they can never erase from their body, so others
 will see and say, 'Let us not bring war to the Trojan people,
 tamer of horses, for they bring with them an always-weeping
 ἄρης . Now, all men hear closely what I have to say to you.
 We must have messengers, as vital as those whom Zeus employs,
 to go bring the message through the city that all boys fit to fight,
 and even old men gone grey with age, must gather on the Wall
 that the gods built for us, for we may require reinforcements.
 And the housekeeper of each home will have a great fire built,
 so the city is ablaze in our light; and guards all over
 will keep a constant watch throughout the night, so that no tricky
 Achaean ambush sneaks into the city unseen while
 our army rests on the plain. All this I say to you must be,
 just as I have said. This command is sound for now, but at dawn
 we shall assemble and speak further. I hope and pray to Zeus,
 and to all the gods, that they will drive these dogs, driven blindly
 by the fates, back into the black ships that brought them here.

Now, as for the army, we will keep sharp guard throughout the night,
 and at dawn the entire army will tighten its armour
 and wake the Achaeans with always-weeping ἄρης fighting

with us. That son of Tydeus, the mighty Diomedes,
 may force me back from the ships and against the wall, or maybe
 I shall kill him, and do as he does—strip him of his armour.
 Tomorrow I shall test his excellence. Both shall come to learn
 if he can withstand my oncoming attack. In truth, I think
 he'll be lying dead at our feet in the dust at the front
 of the fight, alongside many dead friends of his, by the time
 the sun rises on the Scamander. I have no sure knowledge
 of the ways of Athena and Apollo; and all my days
 are allotted and fixed, while they are immortal and ageless;
 but there is one thing going for me : I will bring a great hurt
 to the Argives."

So Hector spoke, and cheers raced through the Trojan lines,
 gathering like the lengthening sound of a rushing river.

Each freed his sweaty horses from the yoke, then bound
 them with a leather cord to each chariot. From
 the city came the men leading the cattle and sheep,
 quickly completing their task; and the wine that sweets
 the mind came just as quickly, with the bread; and much
 firewood was collected. And the wind carried the savoury
 scent of burnt sacrifice up from the plain to Heaven.

Then the men had all night long to think on the order of things,
 on the lines of fight, while their many fires burned.

As when the air is dead calm, and all the stars are glittering
 overhead, with the round moon brightest of all, and the spirit
 of the herdsman who sees this is happy : just so, many fires
 burned in the landscape between River Scamander and the ships

by the sea. Fifty men rested in the blaze of each fire.
And all the horses fed on white barley and other nibbles,
while they stood beside the chariots, awaiting the Dawn.

End of Book VIII

Book IX

Throughout the night, the Trojans kept watch for any enemy movement; but the Achaeans didn't move. Instead, they sat frozen in icy terror, while they contemplated the power of things—both the unexpected strength of the Trojan army, and the unpredictable gods above, whose ways are incalculable, no matter how much thought, prayer, or sacrifice are devoted to them. No Argive would have admitted it aloud, but more than a few warriors of the vast army had to repress a growing panic that night. Meanwhile, their leaders suffered a barely endurable grief for all the fallen heroes of their cause. Just as when two rushing winds assail the seawater from counter directions, and the salty surface curls up with many rising crests, as at Thrace, where the North and West Winds contend offshore, and the swelling water darkens, and hies out into the deep, gathering as it goes a mess of seaweed and sea-wrack : even so, the divided hearts of the Argives weighed ever-heavier with conflict : the desire to win boiled inside, but so did their lamentations for the fallen : so awkwardly they collected many uncomfortable thoughts.

Commander of the army Agamemnon, his heart stricken in this very way, walked to and fro beside the tents of his men, who lay inside them in unquiet rest. Finally, the son of Atreus summoned his ministers, and ordered them to rouse the leaders, but not loudly enough to disturb the others, or to give sign to the enemy. And Agamemnon himself, face wet with tears, worked alongside them, gathering his best men and requesting of them to assemble for a council. And when all sat together at the place of assembly,

under the glimmering stars in the dead middle of the night,
 and Agamemnon stood to address his distinguished warriors,
 he saw in their faces what he felt in his heart, and a tear
 came, even as a trickle of dark water slips slowly down
 a sheer cliff-face, its trail enduring in the rock. So he
 stood before them, their commander, with tears on his face, and sighs,
 heavy-sounding, dropping from him; and finally he spoke out :

“Friends, leaders, rulers of the Argives, and all our counsellors,
 it seems Highest Zeus, too superior to be predicted,
 has led us blindly into subjection, and only now do
 we see that our hands are tied. Too cruel, this. He who is highest
 is cruellest. I speak no insult to our god, only simple truth.
 He promised me in all solemnity that Troy’s wall would fall
 and the city with it, and then we would go home. Now I see,
 only too late, that Zeus has tricked me. He intends for me
 to return to Argos an ignominious, inglorious,
 shameful figure, who lost many worthy warriors. ‘For what?’
 the people will ask.”

And as Agamemnon spoke, his voice rose louder, and hotter;
 and many men began coming out of their tents to listen
 to their leader speak out; and before long, innumerable
 warriors were standing out in the night air, hearing the words
 of their commander :

“So this is the truth of our god, High Zeus,” said Agamemnon.
 “He pleasures in watching the people of an entire city
 hang their heads down when their home is obliterated, and he
 will continue to take joy in this in times to come; for his
 power is greatest, and he can do as he likes. But for us,

Troy stands, seemingly indestructible. So come now! My word is final : we shall board our ships and return to our homeland. For I have no hope of taking Zeus-loving invincible Troy.”

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and in answer, all sat in silence. The silence stretched out for a long, troubled time, as the leaders of the Achaeans sat in vexation and grief, until finally Diomedes spoke out for all to hear his word :

“Son of Atreus, permit me to respond; and hence to call you a fool. I have this right, as is customary in this council. So stifle your anger and hear what I have to say, because I am not done with you. In the first place, do you not recall addressing me, for all to hear, with the following words :

‘Ah, son of Tydeus the war-wise! Why cower like this, staring from afar into the path to war? Go! Tydeus surely never cowered like this, but was ever in front of his friends, destroying the enemy!’

With these words, sir, you call me weak and cowardly. Everyone in the army has heard this story by now, all men young and old. But let us turn to you now. Zeus, deceptive as all gods can be—for they can do anything they want and apparently feel no compunction about any of it—has granted us a man to command us who is possessed of a heart of two halves. You have been granted the sceptre, thus receive the honour due above all men; but courage—courage you do not have. Courage is the greatest power of a man, greater than anything held in your hand. Do you actually think the rest of us

are as weak and cowardly as you say we are? If you want to go home, go : there is the way. Draw your ships into the sea, and all those which followed you from Mycenae. The Achaeans still standing here will raze Troy to dust under our feet. All of you 'board your ships and return to your homeland'! Sthenelus and I alone will get to the end. Heaven brought us here to do one thing : win."

At these words the Achaeans cheered for mighty Diomedes. His name they cried out in assent, clapping their hands; wild applause raced along the lines of tents; and Agamemnon, looking this way and that, said not a word in reply. It was he who now stood silenced, uncomfortably so. Saving his leader just now from response was good Nestor, who rose to his feet slowly while the clapping died down; then the old man spoke out for all to hear :

"Son of Tydeus, mighty Diomedes, far beyond us all in courage at the front; and whose counsels of strategy and tactics, which impress our assemblies, are first among all the youths of your own age : These words you spoke to us just now, no Achaean would reject them, nor demand you retract them. Yet, your words are no full account of the matter we now face. You failed to provide anything practical in their place. So we have not come to the end of thought on this point. You are a young man, Diomedes; you might even be my youngest son; yet you have a wisdom, and you express it well. But come now! Let us be sensible. You and Sthenelus alone will not raze the city of Troy to dust. I who am much older in years than yourself shall speak now, and go through each item in turn, till the whole matter is complete in the mind, so we will move sure. No man must ignore my Word, not even king and commander,

mighty Agamemnon. Any man dismayed to cooperate
in this, is to have no love for his people; and this man begs
to become friendless, homeless, and punished by Immortal Law.”

So spoke Nestor, experienced in war; then continued his counsel :

“However, resolving our essential objective among
ourselves in an assembly, requires preparation.
First, we must obey the night, and order the warriors in
to their tents, to rest. Next, we must send watchmen out past the Wall
to join the snipers I posted along our trench, to keep us
vigilant; let the youngest men here fulfil this particular
assignment. Meanwhile, son of Atreus, commander of men,
now it is for you to prepare the way. The right thing to do
is to order a feast, where the elders shall sit side by side
and speak. Bring us the wine that comes in great supply from Thrace
each day over the tireless sea, and is stored in your tents,
as you are king over a great many people. And while
the wisest of us sit together, we will deliberate,
and determine the best plan. This we must do, close as we are
to the enemy’s many fires blazing across the plain—
which is no sight to please any reasonable Achaean.
This night we shall deliberate, this night shall decide our fate :
whether we will lead ourselves into ruin, or save ourselves.”

Thus spoke Nestor, and all the men heard and obeyed.
The watchmen, then, were chosen, and fitted themselves in armour
with haste, standing round Nestor’s powerful son Thrasymedes;
and round Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, both exceptional
warriors; and round Meriones the bloodthirsty one; and
round Aphareus; and Deïpyrus; and son of Creon

δῖος Lycomedes. These seven warriors were ordered this night to captain one hundred young men each, each man armed with a long death-bringing spear. So they went, and collected in the gap between the deep trench and the high Wall, and sat down for the night. They lit a fire; and each man prepared for himself a late meal.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon, son of Atreus, led the elders inside his tent. There they sat together, and their commander placed before them an unusually satisfying feast : they were given the finest of everything. So they reached out their hands to the many gifts set before them; and when each man was satisfied with food and drink, then Nestor rose to his feet, and prepared to speak his mind. His wise words always persuaded the elders to his point of view, for they thought him the wisest of all Argive counsellors. So Nestor stood before the best minds of the army, and in all earnesty, the old man wove, with commanding words, a wise speech, that all heard, and admired :

“Most honoured commander of men Agamemnon,
you shall be the beginning, foundation, and destination
of my words, for you are king over many men,
and Zeus has set the sceptre in your hand, to hold
command; and all our military decisions, at the end,
rest with you; thus you determine the way of many.
Just as it is fitting for you to speak, and for us to hear,
so it is fitting for you to listen, and hear your men;
for the good they may speak, and the good that may result from it,
will first and foremost bring glory to you. So I will now say
what I think best. No man will produce a thought better than mine,
because I’ve known it from the first, from the moment, long past now,
when you, O Zeus-born commander of the people, robbed a girl,

Briseïs, from the tent of Achilles, and went your way with her,
entirely against my judgment. You angered Achilles.

At that time I said much to dissuade you, but you followed your
god-given prerogative, and unfortunately you angered
our mightiest man, whom himself the gods also honour. But
dishonour is what you showed him, for the whole army to see.
Even now you hold the prize that Achilles has rightfully won.
Now—Let us consider what to do about this. How may we
mollify him? Perhaps with a favourable gift, and words
of the greatest respect?”

And in answer to all this, king of men Agamemnon spoke :

“Old man, justly you have spoken of my blindness.
Yours was a tale I did not enjoy to hear,
for I deny none of it. As powerful as many
armies put together is the one man whom Zeus
respects in his heart, as he now befriends that man,
and for that reason punishes the rest of us
with the deaths of many fine Achaeans. That said,
let us solve this. Since it was I who acted wrongly,
and hurtful, when I followed a blind desire,
it is for me to make good this problem, and pay
this man back with many gifts, to conciliate him,
and to retrace our steps back to the time of our
friendship. Before all of you now I shall detail
all the excellent gifts I plan to present to him.
First, seven tripods, all solid gold, not yet marked
by fire; and for those, twenty shining cauldrons.
I shall give him ten gold measures. And twelve horses,
each prize-winners—well-put-together, very fast.

Just the prizes themselves I've won from those horses
in races, all those precious gold rewards, would be
enough to satisfy any man. Also, I'll give him
seven women excellent in household hand-work,
women of Lesbos, whom I myself selected
when that man plundered that beautiful island home,
and I was there, and chose those seven women of
astonishing beauty. Those seven shall be his
to have, and, in addition, he can have the girl,
the daughter of Briseus. And I am prepared
to take a solemn oath that she and I never
laid together in bed as men and women do,
as is the common way of humankind. All these
gifts will be ready for him at once, and all from
my own personal store. Then, if this satisfies
Zeus, and we obliterate Troy to dust, let him
be first to choose among all the prizes that shall
weigh down the Achaean ships when they sail home
with the riches of Priam's Ilium. Let him
choose first of the bronze and gold; and twenty women
let him take before the rest of us begin to choose,
the most beautiful women after Helen herself.

Yet if everything just enumerated does
not please him, then, if we return to beautiful
Argos, he shall be as a son to me, in honour
and respect an equal to my natural-born
Orestes; he shall be my son, raised in an a-
bundance of good cheer, a darling son.
I have three daughters in my magnificent halls,
Chrysothemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa.

Let him choose one as adored wife, and require
 no bridal gifts to settle on me; in fact, he shall
 receive a dowry no daughter anywhere
 has ever brought to her husband. I am prepared
 to go further. Seven beautiful cities will
 be his to control: Cardamyle; Enope;
 Hire, a vast grassy place; and sacred Pherae;
 and Antheia, with peaceful meadows even gods
 frequent; and beautiful Aepeia; and Pedasus,
 blessed with heavy grape vines. All of these cities
 are spread out at the outermost edge of sandy
 Pylos, and lie close to the sea. The good people
 of these places are rich in cattle and sheep, and
 will pay tribute to him as if to a god; and
 he shall hold the sceptre there, his word shall be law,
 and the good people will reverence him. All this
 I will do for him, if only he brings his anger
 to an end. Now it is the time for him to co-
 operate. Is it not Hades himself who cannot
 be bargained with? and thus is the most hateful god
 to all of us alive? Let him now submit to me.
 I am his commander. He must recognize my precedence."

And Nestor answered him :

"Most honoured commander of men Agamemnon,
 those gifts you promise to give master Achilles
 are not to be dismissed too quickly by any man.
 So come now! let us choose messengers, and send them
 to the tent of Peleus' son at once, and see
 if we can change the mind of master Achilles.

Indeed, I shall choose the men; and may they comply with the council in this. First, let us have Phoenix, beloved of Zeus, lead the way—for δῖος Odysseus, and with him Ajax; and together with them shall go ministers Eurybates and Odios.

Now : let us have water for our hands, and keep silence while we pray to Zeus Supreme to show mercy to the Achaeans.”

Thus spoke Nestor, and all approved his Word. And the ministers purified the men in Agamemnon’s tent, pouring water over their hands; and boy-servants filled the mixing bowls with wine. Then the drinking cups were dealt out, each holding a few first drops, to make libation to Zeus. So the council of elders poured their offering to the god of victory and loss; then each man drank his own fill. When prayer was complete, the messengers started out into the night, but not without a last stern look for each from Nestor, who gave a most serious sidelong glance to Odysseus, to stress the importance of persuading the son of Peleus, their most pre-eminent warrior, to return to his position, and help preserve the army.

So Odysseus and the others walked along the seashore, where the waters of Earthshaking Poseidon roared up the sand; and the men looked to the waves, then to the stars, quick-whispering a prayer to Earthshaker to mollify the proud spirit of Achilles.

When they came to the tents of the Myrmidons, the mightily-antagonising soldiers of Achilles, they found the man himself stretched out peaceful on a couch, plucking a very pretty song from the clear-toned strings of a silver lyre, an exceptionally

finely hand-worked instrument, which he had taken from Thebe,
after he'd obliterated that city of Briseïs' birth.

So Odysseus and Ajax, having entered the tent, watched
Achilles soothe himself with an old song of heroic men.
Patroclus, powerful soldier, lay at Achilles' feet,
attending with widened eyes, awaiting the end of the song.

So Odysseus and Ajax, having entered the tent, stepped
forward; so slowly Achilles turned his head to greet the two
men. And languidly did Achilles—otherwise the quickest
in battle—raise himself to his feet. And Patroclus likewise
stood up. And Achilles looked very pleased to see the two men,
and he spoke, saying :

"Welcome, dear friends. Indeed, dearest to me of all the Argives,
whom otherwise I have no care to see. Odysseus, Ajax,
you must have something exceedingly important to tell me,
since you come here in the middle of the night, under the stars."

This Achilles said, as he led them further in, and offered
them soft couches and sea-purple rugs, and the two messengers
sat down while their host spoke to Patroclus, who stood close by him :

"Set out our largest bowl. Spare much of the water. We'll take it
strong, in honour of my affection for these men, who now sit
under my roof."

So Achilles spoke, and Patroclus heard his friend, and obeyed.
He set down a chopping-block by the warm glow of the fire,
and he set on this the back-pieces of a sheep and fat goat,

and also the backbone of a great hog; these were the richest and tenderest cuts of meat for them to feast on, and Achilles carved them up into little bits, and carefully spitted them, while good Patroclus brought the fire up to a blaze. Then when the flames had died down, and the embers glowed red-hot, Patroclus levelled them out, then laid the spits on racks over the rising heat, and sprinkled the meat with salt. When the pieces were roasted and put onto platters, Patroclus brought out a wicker basket of bread and set it on the table, and then Achilles served the meal. He sat down opposite Odysseus πολύμητις, and requested of Patroclus to give a gift to the gods; so his friend tossed some pieces of victims into the fire. Thus they reached out their hands to the refreshment set before them; and when each man was satisfied with food and drink, then Ajax nodded to Odysseus, who filled his cup with wine, and raised it in honour of Achilles, and said to him :

“Friend Achilles, I have feasted well this night, first in the tent of commander Agamemnon, and now in yours, where the abundance is incomparably satisfying. But we didn’t come here to talk about food. Greatest Achilles, beloved of Zeus, we’re here to remark on our terror of utter destruction. Unless you put on your armour we doubt if we’ll keep our ships from going up in flames. The goddamn Trojans are so confident in their strength just now that their army is spread over the plain, settled too close to our Wall for comfort. They sit by their fires and their confidence insults us as much as it threatens us. And what if they come for our ships at dawn? Then where will we be? Zeus shows them favourable omens, not us, with his lightnings; so madman Hector gloats in his strength as he pares down our numbers, his fury equal to the entire fury of combat

out there. He's relying on Zeus, so respects no other god,
 nor any man opposite him, and will fight and rage until
 he's had his fill. We're sure he's praying for daybreak, so he can
 carve up our ships, take their figureheads as trophies, and burn all
 else, and in the thick smoke cut us down and hack us to pieces.

So this is where we are. If the god fulfils his rage, I fear
 we'll all die here, and I don't want that; I want to see my home
 again. So put on your armour—if you care to pull us back
 from the fire, all the sons of the Achaeans who are suffering.
 Do not do now what you may regret later, for it can never
 be undone, neither your sorrow, nor our deaths. Before that happens,
 think how you may save us all from the coming day of evil.

Friend Achilles, I was there when your father Peleus charged
 you to leave your home, leave Phthia, and go with Agamemnon
 to war. I remember his words : 'My son,' he said, 'great strength shall
 be yours, at the will of Athena and Hera, if they choose;
 so restrain your fiery heart—for kindness is always better—
 and bring no trouble to your friends : for trouble is dangerous,
 trouble can grow; so be kind, and Argives young and old will give
 you honour past belief.' This is what Peleus said, yet you
 fail to remember it. Set your misplaced rage in the right
 direction! Listen now and hear how Agamemnon intends
 to order things rightly. To tell the tale of all the precious
 gifts he wishes to give you would exhaust the tongue of our best
 singer of songs. Seven brand-new tripods; ten measures of gold;
 twelve horses, all prize-winners in speed (he says all the prizes
 he's won from them are wealth enough to satisfy even him).
 He'll give you seven women from Lesbos well-skilled in housework,
 whom he'd taken for himself on the day you stormed the island;

he admits their beauty was the most exceptional of all
 the spoils. All these will be yours, and the daughter of Briseus.
 He'll say he'll swear an oath he never got into bed with her.

So everything will be ready for your hand immediately.

Also, if after all this the gods permit us to reduce
 Troy down to dust, more gifts shall await your hands and your pleasure.
 You can take what you like of the Trojan gold and bronze before
 we begin to divide it up; and you can choose twenty Trojan
 women second in beauty only to Helen. Achilles,
 I am not yet done. If the Argives get out of here alive,
 he says you'll be his son. He says he'll honour you equally
 to Orestes. You'll be to him a 'a darling son', so he said,
 and enjoy all the abundance his natural son relishes.

And still the king of gods and men had not yet rounded out his
 promises. He spoke of his three daughters living in his halls,
 Chrysothemis and Laodice and Iphianassa.
 'Let him choose one as adored wife,' he said, 'and require
 no bridal gifts to settle on me; in fact, he shall receive
 a dowry no daughter anywhere has ever brought to her
 husband.' He said this, and went on. Seven beautiful cities
 will be yours : Cardamyle, Enope, Hire, Pherae, Antheia,
 Aepeia, and Pedasus. All these lie outside sandy Pylos,
 and are near to the sea. The men there are rich with sheep and cattle,
 and he claims they will pay tribute to you 'as if to a god'.
 You'll hold the sceptre of these cities, and your word will be law.

All this is yours, if only you will put away your anger."

So spoke Odysseus, who then said one word more :

“My good friend, it is clear on your face that your hate for the son of Atreus is just too great, him and his gifts—but show pity for the rest of us; the Trojans have worn down the Achaeans. Do this for us, and you *will* be honoured as a god; you will raise yourself up high. You may even take Hector’s life, since he has no fear of coming forward in his deadly rages. He says there is none among the Danaans who can face him and live.”

And quick-moving Achilles replied :

“Odysseus, I’ll tell you how it is plain. Then you can stop twittering on and on about this and that in my face. That man has all the appeal to me as the open gates of Hades. Whatever he says, he’s always hiding more. I don’t believe him and don’t care to. Hear now my answer to his offer : no. I will not be convinced, not by any son of Atreus, nor any Danaan. Where was the gratitude for *me* trimming enemy numbers day by day without rest? I do and do and could end up dead by men I do not know or care to know. Every day I risked everything to fight for no reason of mine; but where was the respect? And now, like a bird holding a beak of food for her chicks, though she herself feels agonies of want, so your hungry leader seeks to drop some morsels down my throat, to make me forget all of my bloody fighting against men protecting their women.”

So said Achilles, and rose from the table. So the other men also stood. They watched him pace his tent, his anger rising as he spoke :

“I’ve taken twenty-three cities around Troy for that man—twelve
 with my ships, eleven on foot with my Myrmidons. I can
 destroy anything any which way and every Achaean
 knows it. I’ve carried off whole cities’-worth of valuables,
 and every time I’d drop it all at Agamemnon’s feet—the
 son of child-loving Atreus (he who would have given you
 a sure feast to remember, with human flesh stuck in your teeth).
 While our commander stays behind with the fleet, himself propped
 up like one of the ships, I’m killing his enemies, and my
 reward is to watch him take all the riches I’ll stolen for him
 and pluck out the best, always the best. Then our commander would
 leave the scraps for the rest of us to divide among the many.
 Meanwhile, he’s passing out some of his pile to other kings
 and nobles, which brings him applause; and unless I’m mistaken,
 all those fine kings and nobles still have their gifts I’ve won for them.
 But from me he takes the finest prize of all I’ve won—my wife!

I use that word because she was unusually pleasing
 to me. That girl has a way of getting into your heart through
 no effort of her own. . . .

I don’t care to hear any solemn
 oaths! Let him have her—every which way of his own!”

And Achilles stopped, and looked into Odysseus’ eyes.
 And Odysseus, who knew all this already, said not a word,
 because Achilles began again :

“Why are we here at all? Who can tell me why the Achaeans
 are fighting the Trojans? I can tell you. The sons of Atreus
 gathered an army together and brought it here for the sake

of 'fair-haired' Helen. We're here fighting for a stolen wife, and during all this Agamemnon steals mine? Do I alone ask all these questions? Are the sons of Atreus the only men who love their wives? I don't think so. And any sensible man who loves his wife protects his wife, and cares for her. And so I loved mine, and cared for her entirely; though all who know nothing of these things will say she was only a 'war-prize' and a 'slave'. But we here know the truth."

And ferocious Achilles radiated rage as he said :

"That man stole her from me. He has cheated me. It would be best for him to test me no further. I know him, and he will not move me, nor cheat me, ever again."

And Achilles stopped, and no one there yet spoke in answer. He then sat down, so all sat down with him; and he continued, saying :

"Friend Odysseus, you and the other leaders must figure out a way to keep your precious ships from burning down to ash. Much has already been done without me. He has raised a wall, and dug a ditch by it, wide and deep, with sharp-tipped stakes in there; yet all that can't keep man-killing Hector back. But when I stood on the plain, Hector couldn't get much farther than the oak tree by the Scaean gate. He tried to come on once and barely escaped with his life. He's met me now, and he's happy to be alive.

So then. Since I have no plans to face δῖος Hector, tomorrow I shall sacrifice to Zeus and the other gods, pile up my victims on my ships, and sail away. If you care to see me go, it will be at earliest dawn. In three days I'll be

home. Many treasures I'll be leaving behind me in this damned place; but many more I'll be bringing home with me : gold, red bronze, grey iron, shapely women—all that was fairly given me in the division of things. But the greatest prize given me has been taken back, and in its place I was given terrible disrespect. So please deliver my answer to the kingly Agamemnon, son of Atreus. And let all the Achaeans hear it, to make them hate him, and beware his treacherous ways, in case he's already planning his next deception on someone, since his shamelessness is unending. You see he dares not come himself and look me in the face. He is a dog, a coward.

Let him think for himself, and act on his own, because he shall get no further help from me. I don't give rewards to those who cheat me; and don't lend my hand to those who show me disrespect. His days of deceiving me with words are over; he has carried it far enough, and more than enough, to 'satisfy' him, I think. When Hector sends him to hell, he can take his riches with him. What other value has he, since King Zeus has stolen his mind? As for his gifts, it makes me ill to hear of them; I'd rather have a sack of animal shit. If he gave me ten times, if he gave me twenty times the amount of everything he has, and if he added to that who knows how much from wherever, all the wealth up in Orchomenus' house—I don't care where—or every last precious trinket in Egyptian Thebes—Thebes where all the houses overflow with valuables, and where the men advance two hundred each, with chariots and horses, out through the city's hundred gates—not if he gave me gifts in number to equal the sands of the sea, or the dust—Agamemnon will not have me, not till he's paid for the outrage he did me, in full. And I wouldn't marry any daughter of any

son of Atreus even if she outdoes golden Aphrodite
 herself in beauty, not even if she has skills to rival
 Athena Bright-Eyes, not even if she sparks unspeakable
 lust in my every body part—even then I wouldn't go
 near her. Let him marry off his deadweight to some Achaean
 equal to his 'nobility', someone—anyone—far more
 'royal' than myself. If the gods bring me home safe, my father
 Peleus—yes, I already have a father; I'm a son,
 I don't need Agamemnon to make me one—yes, Peleus
 himself will find me a suitable wife. Many loveliest
 Achaean women are everywhere in Hellas and Phthia,
 the daughters of leaders who watch over the cities. From these
 I shall choose of whomever I please to make my esteemed wife.
 I could have married many times over already, and brought
 old man Peleus all the wedding gifts my marriage grants him.
 Does the son of Atreus truly believe I will trade my life
 for gifts? A life is worth more than everything in Ilium
 put together, far more than all those old treasures we've heard of,
 gathered here when times were peaceful, before the Achaeans came.
 My life's worth more than all the treasures heaped up past the marble
 doorway to Apollo's home in rocky Pytho! If I want
 cattle or sheep, I'll raid someplace for them. A tripod or horse,
 I'll trade for one. But all the valuables on earth can't give me more
 life, not once I've breathed it out, and it's gone. I can't raid the air
 for it, nor make a trade, equitable or otherwise. For
 my mother Thetis of the sea told me something I've never
 yet said aloud to anyone. She told me my way to death
 has not one but two roads. If I stay in Troy and fight, I will die,
 but win glorious fame everlasting. But if I return
 to my home and homeland, I will live long, but lost is my fame.
 Once death ends me, I'll be forgotten, utterly and forever."

At that, Achilles withdrew from the table, and stood staring into the fire. No one dared speak; and Odysseus waited.

“If I were you,” so Achilles continued, “I would set sail for home immediately. Lofty Troy will not fall to hopes. Zeus has shown his hand over their heads, and they are encouraged.

So go to the wise Achaean elders, report what I’ve said, fulfil your duty as loyal soldiers, and tell them they need a better plan—unless they prefer to see all their men dead. Because my anger has not been eased by your contribution.”

So spoke Achilles, and all the men there wondered at his words. Indeed, old man Phoenix, who’d been standing guard outside the tent, now burst in, with tears streaming down his face, for he had heard it all, as Achilles’ voice, full of passion, had travelled far. And venerable Phoenix, terrified at the loss of the ships, spoke out, saying :

“Dearest Achilles! If your awful rage has set your heart for home, if you scorn to defend our ships from fire, what, dear child, will I do here without you, alone? Remember, it was I whom Peleus sent you to, on your way out from Phthia to Agamemnon, a lovely little child knowing nothing of war’s evil arts, nor of assemblies where men rise and distinguish themselves. Peleus trusted me to educate you in all good ways of words and deeds. Dear child, if you go, I will not stay without you in this terrible place, not even if a god should promise to scrape the years off and give me back my blessed youth, back when

I first left Hellas καλλιγύναικα, on the run from my father Amyntor—son of Ormenus—who raged at me over his heavenly beautiful concubine, whom he loved so much he ignored his wedded wife, my mother; so she was always down on her knees, begging me to take that woman myself, so that my father might feel disgust for her, and give her up.”

And old man Phoenix sat down in a chair, and continued :

“So I did as my mother asked; but my father soon found out, and angrily called down all the horror of the awful Furies on my head, praying that I would go childless. It was a curse that turned out considerable, you might say, because a child of my own has never sat on my own knees. Evidently the gods heard my father—Zeus Underworld (for he occupies everywhere at once) and hateful Persephone of Hades, though some hail her as a goddess of spring, ‘bringer of fruit’, though I’ve never understood that part of it. (Was that justice, what happened to me? A lifetime of thought, and still I don’t know.) Well then. My father simply declaring the curse to my face was bad enough, so I thought then, so I planned to lift my sword and kill him. But a god came to me—I never knew which one—who lowered my hand, and let my anger go, and put a voice in my mind of the people and their many common despisings, and I decided the reputation of a father-killer among the Achaeans was not the finest solution for me. This alternative was better : to just leave my home forever, and bid farewell to my angry father. But my friends and the rest of my family begged me to stay, and prayed for me, slaughtering many goodly sheep, and twist-horned cattle; and many fat hogs were stretched over the fire and singed clean

of their bristles; and many jars of the old man's wine was drunk.
For nine nights, like soldiers on watch they sat by my sleeping body.
They took it in turns, and let no fires burn down, neither the one
by my bedchamber door, nor the one lighting up the courtyard.
But then the tenth night came. It was pitch-black out, and I unsealed
the lock on my door and set myself loose, easily leaping
the courtyard wall; and no one saw me go, neither maids nor men.
Aye, long ago that was, when I fled far off through broad Hellas.
Phthia was a beautiful spot in my eyes, so I stopped there,
with its deep soil and many flocks; and King Peleus himself
received me kindly into his palace, and loved me as a son,
and made me rich, giving me the land of the Dolopians
to rule, there on the far edge of Phthia. But before that gift,
I raised you as a young brother to manhood, and now you are
godlike Achilles. I loved you then just as I love you now.
Back then, at the feast I would set you on my knees, and give you
the first cut of the roast meat, and hold up the cup to your lips.
And many a time in your childishness you dribbled the wine
out all down my tunic. Ah, how much have I suffered and worked
for your happiness, all the time knowing the gods would never
give me a natural son of my own! Ah, godlike Achilles!
You were my son to me. Now you must think of *me*, and save *me*.
It's not in you to be cruel, child—not to your friends; I know this.
So I beg you to get a hold of yourself, and put that rage
away. The very gods themselves change their minds, if they choose it,
if they think it right; and the gods are our exemplars of all
goodness and glory and strength. A mere man himself can alter
a god's intent, by sending incense rising along with the scent
of sacrifice up to heaven, and the pouring of the wine
down to earth; and thereby one man's sin may be made good, at least
in God's eyes. For just as I took you, Achilles, for my son,

so Zeus hears our prayers as if from his daughters whom he takes
 to his heart, though they be limping, and stricken in look, and with
 eyes downturned—the very picture of a man depressed in shame.
 These prayers keep on regardless, and follow the steps of Sin;
 they make it their business to do so. But Sin always outruns them,
 and is always ahead of them—*for often a person does,*
before a person understands—so Sin swiftly encompasses
 the earth entire, and only here and there our prayers flicker,
 while men all over fall. Thus, one day their prayers come, too,
 seeking a remedy for the pain inside them, and a return
 to goodness. So more prayers are heard in heaven, but only
some are blessed by God as he would his daughters. Because the man
 who denies goodness on earth obstinately, repeatedly,
 —*his* prayers are refused, and that prayer becomes its own curse,
 because when Zeus will not listen, the Goddess of Ruin comes
 down, and the man suffers terrible repayment. Achilles,
bend, as Zeus bends to his own daughters, as all good men follow
 the good, if they know how to. Hear now my word on this point.
 If son of Atreus weren't offering you gifts, and promising you
 many more, but raging in enduring anger, I would never
 ask you to free your own rage and fight to defend the Argives,
 who are in desperate times. And not only does he offer you
 countless gifts, but he has sent to your tent the best of the army,
 who also happen to be your closest friends here. There is no
 man in the whole army who doesn't acknowledge your grievance;
 but, just now, be calm, and bring no shame on the words and mission
 of these two warriors. We have all heard told many stories
 of heroes of old times, who, though enraged almost to madness,
 would cool at the sight of gifts, and be won over by fair words.
 All this brings to mind an old story, a very old story,
 and I will tell it now just as it was, here among my friends.

There was a tribe of men called the Curetes, upon once a time.
They lived with the battle-hardened Aetolians side by side.
One time these two tribes were fighting for the city Calydon,
the Aetolians defending it, and, hoping to ruin
it, the now-forgotten Curetes, who were no easy foe,
and had an ally in Artemis, who, from her golden throne,
had let out a plague over the city, enraged that its king,
Oeneus the wine-maker, had failed her, forgetting
to give her the first fruits from his sunniest orchard. The other
gods all feasted on his offerings of oxen, and the archer
huntress alone was left out. Whether he simply forgot her,
or had no care, he had committed a terrible error.
So the plague she sent Calydon was a ferocious wild boar
with deadly bright-white tusks; this freak of the gods had singular
knowledge of things, and knew how to couch in grass unseen amid
men, and over and over worked evil on the orchard land,
which greatly vexed Oeneus. This monster could uproot a tree
roots and all, and on many a morning the men came to see
multitudes of tall trees lying row on row, dead on the ground,
from lowest root-tip to highest-blooming fruit. Meleager,
Oeneus' son, brought down the boar, after he summoned round
him, from many cities, the best manner of huntsman and hound;
for not just any sort of man could kill this godlike monster,
so huge it was; and many of its would-be killers ended up dead.
But after the boar was finally extinguished, the city's
deadly troubles were only beginning, because the Curetes
came on, with great war-noise and shouting, hoping to steal the head
and hide of the godly monster from hero Meleager,
who lived in the city of Calydon. As long as he warred
with the Curetes, leading an army of many behind him,

Meleager defended the city, and kept the foe back from
 its walls. But then the fortunes of the city of Calydon
 changed, when its hero Meleager swelled with indignation;
 it was a rage any man might feel, however wise at heart.
 The cause of this was his mother Althaea. The argument
 kept Meleager at home beside his wife Cleopatra,
 beautiful daughter of Marpessa, herself the fair daughter
 of Euenos, and of Idas, the mightiest man on earth
 then alive at the time. Now mighty Idas had to fight with
 Apollo Far-Shooter for the hand of shapely Marpessa,
 so lifted his heavy bow, but Zeus let her chose her lover
 herself, for reasons of his own. But for a time she was gone
 off with Apollo, who had stolen her, and, left in their home,
 her parents renamed her Alcyone, the name of the bird
 who calls out shrilly, the kingfisher; for her dear mother's sad
 sighs were many and long. So, as I was saying : beside his wife
 Cleopatra, Meleager stayed at home, seething with rage
 at his dear mother Althaea, unable to dismiss
 from his mind the curse she'd uttered when he killed one of his brothers,
 for a reason I cannot remember at all. But I know
 she beat the gracious earth with her fists, calling the gods below,
 Hades and awful Persephone, having sunk to her knees,
 drenched in tears, calling on the Furies who walk in darkness
 to come up from Erebus and bring painful death to her son,
 which the female Furies love to do. So the battle-din
 was enormous close to the city gates, and its high walls shook;
 and inside, the Aetolian elders prayed : 'What would it take,
 Meleager,' they asked, 'to rise and fight?' They promised the best
 piece of land all round was his, full fifty acres of a tract
 divided in two, half vineyard, half plough-land, cut just for him
 out of the public land. So old king Oeneus implored him,

standing at the door of his son's lofty bedchamber, shaking
the well-fitted doors; and his sisters and dear mother, joining
in the prayer, added to the noise, yet he refused them all
the more, and his best friends tried, and failed, and he would not call
out an answer to anyone until at last his bedchamber
rocked with the onslaught of the Curetes, a great scaler
of walls; and they were setting fires all throughout the city.
Then his stately wife begged him to imagine the enemy
having its way with the wives of the dead men : led off as slaves,
his wife and children, is the least of woes after the fires
have reduced the city to ash and levelled it with the dust.
So he put on his armour, even as he heard his wife speak
her evil words, and, glittering all round, he went forth to seek
some of the enemy to kill. Thus, obeying his own heart,
he saved his people from death on the day of evil. But
he never did get the gifts that were promised, as I recall it.
Even so, as it is, he saved his people from destruction.

My friend, my child, give up this rage in your heart; it will lead
to nothing good. Do not let heaven lead you in this, for it
may not be heavenly to be led in this way. Once the ships
are on fire it will be that much more harder to save ourselves
from comprehensive death. So why not take all the gifts offered
you, and fight? And in your splendour you will be honoured as a god.
But if you dismiss his gifts and leave, you will lose out on lustre
that would be yours afterwards."

And Achilles answered him :

"Phoenix, father, beloved of Zeus, that 'lustre' you speak of
is unimportant to me. I have gifts already, from Zeus :

this generous strength of mine shall stay mine as long as I live, even as the ships burn. And hear this Word I now say to you, and take it to heart : stop all this weeping and wailing to please the son of Atreus, and have him get his way. You ought not show him love, for you might lose mine. If you're with me, father, you'll show my enemy the same hatred I have for him. So, if you wish it, the honour given me by Zeus is yours to share. The others here shall deliver my message. You stay with me in my tent, and lay yourself on this soft couch. At dawn we will return to the question : do I stay, or do I go?"

At these words from Achilles, Patroclus nodded in silence, and began preparing a bed for old man Phoenix, spreading thick blankets over the couch—all this a sign for the others that they should leave the hut at once.

So godlike Ajax now spoke out, saying :

"Odysseus," he said, "let's go. Our command is finished here. Our purpose cannot be accomplished; and we should deliver the bad news to the Danaans now, who await our return. We've heard cruel and perverse words in this tent tonight. One thing I know for certain is that we honour Achilles as the best among us, but that isn't enough for him to consider the rest of us by the fragile ships. He is a cold and pitiless man. A brother is killed, or a son dies untimely, and the killer pays a price for his deed, then stays in the land without fear of reprisal, for the proud hearts of the dead one's family are restrained by the settlement of recompense. Such is one way of justice among men. As for mighty Achilles, along with godlike strength Zeus gave you an evil, stubborn heart.

All this is happening because of one girl, when we offer you seven? Seven that are far the best we have? And offer to you many more gifts besides them? No, Achilles, be kind, show respect to your people—for we have come to you tonight from all the men of the army. We three are the best of friends; we must be able to make a pledge to satisfy us all.”

And Achilles replied :

“Ajax, all your words make perfect sense. But my heart swells with rage whenever I think of that person, how the son of Atreus brought all this on needlessly, on me and on all the Argives, as though I were a stranger without any worth or rights. Go now and deliver my message. I shall draw no blood in war until Priam’s son, the warlike δῖος Hector, is standing outside my tent, having come down here after killing many Achaeans, and is setting my ships aflame. Here at my tent, beside my ship, I think δῖος Hector will be stopped for good.”

So spoke Achilles. Thus, two-handled cups were given to each, and each poured out a libation; then Odysseus stormed out of the tent, leading the way back beside the beached ships overlooking the restless waves of the sea.

Meanwhile, Patroclus requested of his companions and handmaidens to spread out a comfortable couch for old Phoenix; and they heard, and prepared a bed of many layers : fleeces, blanket, and the finest linen sheet, soft on the skin. There the old man rested till the coming of radiant Dawn.

The tent, well-put-together, had an inmost part where Achilles

slept; beside him lay Diomedes, beautifully shapely,
 whom he'd brought with him from Lesbos. In another bed in this
 recess lay Patroclus, beside the beautifully shapely
 Iphigeneia, whom δῖος Achilles had given him when he sacked
 steep Scyros, the kingship of Enyeus, a son of Dionysus.

Now, when the others returned to the huts of Atreus' son,
 the Achaean leaders rose together and raised golden cups
 in honour of their return. And commander of the army
 Agamemnon made official enquiry, asking of them :

"What did he say? Come now! Mighty Odysseus,
 man of many victories! Is the man willing
 to defend our ships from the destructive fire?
 Or did he say no, and still fulminates in rage?"

So Odysseus of many victories answered him :

"Son of Atreus, most honoured of Achaeans, Agamemnon
 king of men, the man said no. He is not willing to calm down.
 The proposal we brought irritated his rage all the more.
 He refuses you and all your gifts. The man advises you
 to think up your own plan to save the ships and the Achaean
 men. He threatens to draw his ships into the sea at first light
 and sail for home. He encouraged us to do the same,
 considering the war is now unwinnable. Lofty Troy
 shall not fall, he says, because Zeus holds his hand over their heads,
 so they think they have an edge, and fill with death-bringing courage.
 He told us you should hear this, which Ajax can confirm, and the
 two wise ministers. But the man invited Phoenix to rest
 for the night on a soft couch there, in the vestibule of his tent,

so that tomorrow he may board one of his ships and follow him away from here, if he so chooses; for the man will not take Phoenix away against his will.”

Thus spoke Odysseus, and all the men had lowered their cups and stood in silence, wondering at the brunt of the message. Then for a long while each man stood thoughtful in the troubled silence, all these heroic sons of the Achaeans, until Diomedes spoke :

“Son of Atreus, most glorious king of men Agamemnon, we shouldn’t have done that—beg δῖος Achilles to return, nor offer him gifts, however many; for the man is full of himself at the best of times, and our begging has only fixed him in his purpose. But hear me now. Achilles will go or he will stay, and in the heat of the battle we’ll leave him to decide for himself. Where is it written that we need him for certain to win? If some god motivates him to join us, so be it. But come now! Allow me to tell us where we stand. Now we must fortify ourselves one last time with bread and wine, for these will bring us strength and courage; and when early Dawn comes we will quickly gather the men and chariots together in front of the ships, and you, leader of men Agamemnon, must rouse them, and fight in the front-lines yourself, to inspire us.”

So spoke Diomedes, and the leaders agreed with his Word. So the libation was poured, then each man returned to his tent, and lay down, and relaxed into the god-given gift of sleep.

End of Book IX

Book X

All night long the leaders of the Achaean army rested in their tents, unable to release their worries from their mind, and sleep; though all around them their army of warriors lay quiet in oblivious slumber. The watchmen alone were moving through the Argive camp beside the agitated sea and their vulnerable ships. And the commander of the army Agamemnon lay agitated on his couch, unable to sleep like all the other leaders, for thoughts ran on and on rampant through his restless mind. Finally he rose up, and flung round himself a blazing yellow-gold lion-skin that reached down to his feet, vestige of a great and fierce beast; then fitted his shining armour round his shoulders and body; then took his spear and went to the Wall, and looked out on the broad Scamander plain.

As when the sky flashes with lightning flung by Hera's husband, anticipatory of the falling of heavy rain, or hail of prodigious size, or snow—little snowflakes that together cover all the fields as one chill blanket—so each thought that came to Agamemnon gathered as a burden within him; and sighs arose from the depths of his heart; and he noted his body trembling as his eyes took in the Trojan lines, with their fires burning, and the sound of flutes, and the mingled voices of men. Then his massive heart burst with pent-up emotion, sending out a terrible moan, as the ancient seawaves moan; and he turned to his fragile ships, then looked down at his hand, and found there a handful of hair torn at the roots, which he hadn't even noticed he'd done. He sighed at the sight of it, then decided to go to Nestor, hoping the older man might plan with him a crafty way to keep back the Trojans from the precious ships.

Just so was his brother Menelaus unable to sleep;
 he, too, trembled, in terror that for his sake the Achaean
 warriors, who braved the deep salt sea to come to Troy to fight,
 now faced destruction. So he rose up from bed, and covered his
 massive shoulders in a spotted leopard's skin, and lifted to
 his head his shining bronze helmet, and took his death-bringing spear
 into his grip. Then he left his tent to wake up his brother,
 whom he now found hastening through the night, in full battle array.

And Menelaus, happy to see his brother, spoke out :

"Good brother," he asked, "why are you armed? Have you a plan to spy
 out enemy positions from up close? That's a daring deed
 to undertake, to mingle with the enemy at night. Who
 here is bold enough for the task? It will be a man of great
 courage and cunning."

And Agamemnon king of men replied :

"Menelaus, you and I require some crafty thinking,
 here and now, if we're to save everything—ships, ourselves, and all
 else; for it is plain that Zeus has turned his eye away from us.
 Evidently he prefers the sacrifices Hector sends
 up. (It would be well for us to learn his procedure.) Never
 I have seen or heard tell of what that one man did in one day.
 He handed us many horrible sights and the Achaeans
 are fairly worried. All this he did to us just as he is,
 for he is no son of any god or goddess. Still and all,
 Zeus finds him appealing. These works of his will live on in men's
 words for times to come, to the shame of all Achaeans, perhaps

till the end of time. Well then. Come! Run down the ships and summon Ajax and Idomeneus. I'm to get Nestor out of bed. This night we work. I keep thinking about our outposts; I feel the Trojans close, and I want all our watchmen alert. They'll listen to Nestor's Word; his son is the captain of the guards, he and Meriones, Idomeneus' second; it was I who gave them this command. We must have confidence that they will serve their assignment well."

And Menelaus replied :

"What are you saying? What is the specific command for now? And shall I stay out there by the Wall, and wait for you to come? Or do you want me back here, once I've delivered the orders I'm waiting to hear of."

And Agamemnon answered him :

"Stay by the Wall. On the way, raise your voice and wake every man we have; and be sure to address them most formally, each man with both family and father's name, giving honour to everyone. And don't question this herald's work of yours; we'll both be busy tonight, and no task is too small if it serves to save the whole. Why Zeus prepared all this heavy grief for us on the guiltless day of our birth is a question we'll return to, if we live."

Thus spoke Agamemnon, then specified his brother's command for the watchmen to stay alert. So Menelaus rushed off to fulfil his charge, while Agamemnon, the commander of the army, went to worthy Nestor's tent, seeking counsel. He found the old man sleeping on his soft bed outside under the stars, with his arms and armour lying beside him within

hand's reach, including his shield, and two spears, and shining helmet,
 and his warrior's belt, which he daily fitted to himself
 when he prepared for combat, where men are destroyed right and left.
 Daily he led his men forward, having no thought of old age.
 At the sound of Agamemnon's approach, he lifted his head
 up onto his elbow, and spoke out :

"Who is this, creeping alone by the ships under cover
 of night, when sensible men are sleeping? Are you looking
 for a mule that's bolted? Are you looking for a friend?
 Speak out and say your business here. What do you want of me?"

And king of men Agamemnon answered him in a whisper :

"Nestor, son of Neleus, head and hand of the Achaeans,
 do you not recognize Agamemnon?"

"Yes," Nestor answered, "I recognize king of men Agamemnon.
 But why is king of men Agamemnon creeping alone by
 the ships, and waking me up out a sound sleep?"

And Agamemnon answered :

"Nestor, I have a terrible fear that the Argives face ruin.
 Thoughts of war keep me awake, and the troubles of our army.
 Right now I don't know what to think, except that Zeus has thrown me
 into continual trouble; and every day I live I
 sink deeper into it. Enough then of trouble! I feel a
 trembling in me and my heart is ready to burst out as if
 on the tip of a bloody spear. I must act, and make things right;
 if it's not too late. If you want to help, since you can't sleep either,

come now with me down to the watchmen. We must ensure they stay vigilant. For all we know they may have forgotten their orders and lie sleeping, leaving us open to attack. The enemy is close, and we know nothing of their plans. They may come at us any time now, using the dark, and strike down our sleeping men."

And Nestor answered him :

"Son of Atreus, I think Zeus Orderer will not grant Hector all that the man now confidently expects shall be. Did you not just explain to me how inconstant are the ways of God? I think his troubles will exceed our own by far—if only great Achilles himself will wake up, as we are now awake. He must drain away the rage from his heart; and fighting is good for that. But we must wait for the man to come to his senses, as I now have. So I will get up and come with you. And I think we should waken others as well. The son of Tydeus should rise, and Odysseus, and Ajax, and Meges. A boy should be sent at once to wake Ajax and Idomeneus; their ships are far down the line and no quick walk. All our bravest and strongest must awake. But, you must allow me a moment to unconceal my anger for Menelaus. That he's your brother, and honoured by all, just now will not keep back my words, howbeit I speak them into the face of Agamemnon, whose anger is no small thing. Look how I'm awake, yet that man sleeps! And the king has been left to repair this trouble himself! It would be most proper of all just now to be woken up by Menelaus. He is the one who should be busying himself with prayer, and meeting with the Achaean leaders; for this trouble can no longer be endured, if we're waking in the night to fix it."

And king of men Agamemnon replied :

“Your lordship, hereafter I will gladly give you all the time in the world to damn him. It’s very much true he shows little effort, both in thought and act; yet he’s neither lazy nor dumb : he’s just always looking at me and waiting to follow my lead. But tonight he was different; he was awake even before I was. And I’ve already sent him to summon some you’ve mentioned. So up then! We’ll find him with the watchmen by the gates, for that’s the meeting place for now.”

And Nestor answered him :

“Very good,” he said. “For that reason no Argive should take it ill when addressed by him, or even given direct orders. I’d say that’s important, since he’s a leader of the army.”

That said, he slipped his old bones into an elegant tunic, and buckled fair sandals to his feet; and flung a purple cloak around him, broad and folded double, its fine fleecy wool puffing him up; and he fastened it with a golden pin. Then he put a sharp, death-pointed spear in a fist, and went off dutifully down the lines of the Achaean warriors’ ships; all the while noting the enemy campfires lighting up the sky above the plain.

First then, Odysseus, Zeus’ rival in thought, Nestor roused from sleep with raised shrill voice. So at once Odysseus awoke and came from the hut and spoke out to the man, asking of him :

“Why are you acting this way by the ships, alone in the night?
What need is so great that you come here to bring me to my feet?”

And Nestor answered him :

“Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded Odysseus,
show me no anger. I come because we are in great danger,
the entire Achaean army. So follow with me, that
we may wake all men whom we think may make contribution
to a decision we must settle on tonight : to flee, or fight.”

This he said. So Odysseus πολύμητις went back in
to his hut and buckled his intricately carved shield around
his shoulders; then they moved on down the line.

So they came to Diomedes, son of Tydeus. They found
him outside his hut by his arms and armour; and around him
slept his soldiers with their heads upon their shields. And each man’s spear
was fixed in the ground upright, so when their bronze tips caught the fire
light, like sudden bolts of lightning their gleaming was visible
from far off down the line, as if Zeus himself was speaking out.
But Diomedes was sleeping. Beneath him he had spread out
the skin of an great ox that had once lived in the fields. His head,
meanwhile, rested on a richly embroidered rug rolled up
under him as a pillow. So Nestor came to stand by him,
and looked down in disgust, and touched him with the heel of his foot.
Diomedes instantly awoke to the sound of Nestor’s voice :

“Up, Diomedes, son of Tydeus! Do you plan to sleep
all night? Are you not aware the Trojans are spread out over
the rise on the plain, and have settled very close to our ships?

And between our forces, nothing much more than a strip of dirt
holds them back?"

Thus Nestor. So Diomedes leapt up from sleep in a flash,
and spoke out, saying :

"Cruel man! I was asleep! And aren't there younger Achaean sons
to do this job of yours, waking up leaders in the middle
of the night? Why do I ask? Worthy sir, everyone knows
there is no arguing with you."

And old man Nestor replied :

"Indeed, child, you speak well. I have excellent sons; and many
are the boy-messengers I could presently summon to pass
my words through the camp. But know that we stand on a razor's edge,
and any one moment now might decide it all, whether we
live or die. So you go, then, for you are younger than I,
and wake Ajax and Meges. Consider it a kindness to me."

Thus spoke Nestor. So Diomedes flung his lion-skin round
his shoulders, and grabbed his shining spear, and left the tent to go
rouse the heroes from sleep, and escort them to the meeting place.

So the Argive leaders assembled at the most critical
position of the guard, where they found the watchmen wide awake
beside their weapons. Just as sheep dogs keeping watch in farmyards
grow still when a sound comes out of the trees, and they scent the wild
beast that roams the hills and comes down to kill : so fierce motion breaks
out, and the herdsmen, lately sleepy, come instantly alert :
just so were the sharp-eyed guards attentive through the edgy night,

thinking nothing of sleep while they steadily scanned the plain
for any sight or sound of the enemy moving in.

Old man Nestor was happy to see the watchmen awake,
set there in an obscured position between Wall and trench,
and encouraged them with spirited words :

“Keep on, dear children, keep watching! If sleep
seizes you, you may wake to feel the pleasure
of your enemy up close and personal.”

So said Nestor, advancing in haste, followed by the members
of the council he’d summoned; and Meriones went along,
and mighty Nestor’s son also, for these two were invited
to contribute in deliberations. Together they went
beyond the trench, and convened at a spot empty of corpses,
for this was the place where colossal Hector had turned back
when night fell. So the council of leaders sat down, and reasoned.

It was venerable Nestor who was first to speak, saying :

“Friends, who is bold enough to test his courage, and infiltrate
the Trojan ground? To cut down any stragglers at our edges,
or to hear talk among themselves of their leaders’ strategy?
It would be valuable to know if they intend to hold position
imminent to our ships; or plan to withdraw into the city,
now that they’ve made harsh work of us. If he who learns this returns
safe to reveal it, vast will be his fame among the army.
And a great gift will be given him : each leader will donate
a black ewe with lamb, so that no man here will possess such a
multitude of trophies. Furthermore, this man will be sung of

at feasts and gatherings over the earth entire, one day
when our tale is told. Who here is up to the challenge?"

So spoke Nestor, and was answered with silence.

Finally Diomedes spoke :

"Nestor, I'm happy to get up close and personal
in the enemy camp. I'll go it alone, though
a second man offers a second pair of eyes.
This increases the vision of both, as each can
tend his own direction; and the wider the sight,
the sharper the plan. If I go alone, the work
and formulation to be done goes slower."

Thus spoke Diomedes, and the two Ajaxes were ready
to go with him, and Meriones was ready to go with
him, and Nestor's son was ready to go, and Menelaus
was ready to go, as was Odysseus πολύμητις ,
for going down into the army of the Trojans appealed
to the spirit of daring that forever drove his heart.

Then Agamemnon spoke :

"Diomedes, son of Tydeus, friend to me and to all
Achaeans, you have the privilege to choose your second from all
these mighty warriors. All of them are eager. Yourself choose
the man best for the task, and weigh no other matter."

So spoke Agamemnon, to ensure his brother not be chosen
improperly for the task.

And Diomedes answered him :

“I choose Odysseus.”

And Odysseus spoke to Diomedes, saying :

“Let’s go. The dark narrows as dawn draws close.

The stars say only a short time of night remains.”

So he said, then the two men strengthened the armour protecting their bodies. Steadfast Thrasymedes gave son of Tydeus a fine two-edged sword, for his own weapon was back by the ships, and put on his friend’s head what the young soldiers called a dog’s-skin, a tightly-fitting helmet without horsehair plume, a common sight on the battlefield. Meriones, meanwhile, gave Odysseus a bow and quiver of arrows; also a sword; and the dog’s-skin helmet he put on his head was actually made of ox-hide, and was reinforced with leather straps that set the cap tight, and it bristled with a thick-set outer covering of teeth from a ferocious wild boar, a very artful piece of work, and the inside was provided with a padded lining of felt. This was the very dog’s-skin that Autolycus stole out of Eleon, after he’d slipped craftily into the house of Amyntor, son of Ormenus, a stronghold men had called impregnable. He won the admiration of sneaky Hermes from this; then he gave the cap to Amphidamas of Cythem, who took it to Skandeia on Kythira, Aphrodite’s oldest island sanctuary. Amphidamas gave the cap to Molos, brother of Idomeneus, as a house-gift, who himself passed it on to his own son Meriones

to wear in the war; so now, the very cap once handled by Autolycus, Odysseus' grandfather, now protected the head of Odysseus.

So when the two men were secure in their body armour they went their way, and left the other leaders behind. And Athena goddess of strength and victory sent a bird up beside them, a black-crowned night heron drifting close by; and though the dark obscured it from their eyes, the men heard its cry in their minds, a gentle melody; and Odysseus rejoiced at the omen, and prayed to Athena, Deviser of Plans :

*"Hear me, child of Zeus, if you care to,
you who have ever stood by me, who does
not move unseen by you when advancing
on the enemy. Be my friend one more time,
Athena, and at your most outstanding,
in a way as never before, and grant
that we two return to glorious fame
to the ships, with a tale to tell of
much hurt done on unsuspecting Trojans."*

And Diomedes, too, prayed in silence, saying :

*"Hear me, child of Zeus, goddess Unwearied.
Be with me now as you went with δῖος
Tydeus, into Thebe, that time he went
as ambassador, then conveyed a kind
word to the Cadmeians and left them
as a just slaughterer of many men.
You, then, were there with him when he cut down*

*the killers lying in wait in the reeds.
 You helped devise for him memorably
 warlike deeds. Goddess, choose to stand with me
 now, and protect me; and if I return
 I'll gift you a heifer, a yearling
 yet innocent of the yoke, a life lived
 in freedom, whom no man has subjected.
 I promise to pour over her broad brow
 and horns a sprinkling of gold, and give her
 to you."*

Thus the two warriors prayed, and goddess Athena heard them,
 the daughter of Zeus. Off they went, the two men moving like lions
 in the black night, forging a path through the slaughter on the plain,
 picking their way past the corpses, the wrack of arms and armour;
 and stepping over puddles of dark blood.

Within the walls of Troy, godlike Hector was likewise awake.
 He had summoned round him all the best Trojans, leaders
 and ministers and warriors; and when the assembly
 was called to order, he developed a cunning plan, saying :

"Who among us is eager for dangerous work? And payment
 proper to the job? For my word is certain that the reward
 will be great. A chariot and two noble horses are his,
 the very best now standing by the ships of the Achaeans,
 to whoever dares go now by those ships (and thereby win glory)
 and spy out if they're guarded with vigilance, as usual;
 or, now that we have them on the run, our enemy plans flight.
 Weary from our heavy labours, perhaps their guard is down,
 and our enemy is open to swift attack, and their ships

to our deadly fire.”

So spoke Hector, and was answered with silence.

Finally a Trojan by the name of Dolon spoke,
the son of most faithful minister Eumedes,
and the one brother in a family of five
sisters; who was a rich man, in gold and bronze both,
but was accounted unpleasant in appearance;
yet quick-footed. Dolon, then, said to the Trojans
and to Hector :

“I’ll go to their open ships and see what’s what.
Come now! Raise the staff of office, and swear before
all that you will give me the horses and chariot
of Achilles himself. Who has ever seen a chariot
so fine with bronze? For that I will outrun your expectations.
I’ll go straight through the camp to Agamemnon’s ship.
There, no doubt, an assembly is debating whether
to flee, or fight.”

So spoke Dolon, and Hector lifted the staff, and swore to him,
saying :

“Let Zeus hear me, who decides everything,
that no other man but yourself shall touch
those horses. I say only you among us
shall have an everlasting fame in them.”

Thus Hector swore an oath ultimately untrue, but no man
living can know the mind of God. So his idle words excited

Dolon, who set his curved bow on his shoulders, and flung a wolf skin round him; and on his head he fitted a cap of weasel hide. Then he took his spear and went forth from the army toward the enemy ships. But Hector's oath went amiss in several ways; including the fact that Dolon would never come back from those ships to bring word to him. For now, however, Dolon ran across the plain with the wide army of men and horses behind him.

Odysseus and Diomedes, meanwhile, were also crossing the plain, moving in Dolon's direction. Odysseus went still, and held Diomedes back, whispering in his ear :

"Diomedes, here comes someone from the Trojans.
Perhaps a spy. Or a scavenger to strip the dead bodies.
Let him pass us. Then we'll rush him and take him. We do it fast,
and quietly. But if the man outruns us, you pursue him.
Trap him in with your spear; we're not letting him get back."

So said Odysseus. Then the men moved from the path, and lay down among the dead. And the Trojan ran past, oblivious of them. They waited for him to reach the span of a day's furrow for a mule—and mules pull the solid plough through deep soil faster than oxen—then they bolted after him, and he heard their footsteps and turned round. And in his heart of hearts he hoped friends from the city were coming to bring him back on Hector's orders; but it was plain they were enemies and only a spear-fly away or less, so he pushed his legs to his fastest, and straightaway they took chase. As two saw-toothed dogs, acute in pursuit, stay fixed on a doe or a rabbit which runs through the woods shrieking, just so did Diomedes and destroyer of cities Odysseus chase Dolon, cutting him off from

his people and keeping hard on him. And Dolon, hearing them
 press on him, ran toward the Achaean ships, but now for his life;
 yet was unaware he was approaching the wide-eyed watchmen.
 It was then that Athena gifted Diomedes with strength,
 so that no other warrior might exult at Dolon's capture,
 and Tydeus' son be too late. So he sprang at Dolon,
 who saw a death-bringing spear-tip in the corner of his eye,
 and heard Diomedes speak :

"Stop now, or I kill you."

So he spoke and let fly, and the polished spear-point passed over
 the man's right shoulder, deliberately missing him to stick
 fast in the dirt before him. Dolon stopped moving or he would
 have run into it. So he turned round to face his enemies,
 swooning with terror, stammering in place of talk, and panting,
 and his teeth chattering in his twitchy mouth. The two men came close
 and took his hands. And tears fell from Dolon's eyes, as he finally
 got out :

"Let me live, and all my wealth is yours. My home is beautiful
 to see, and in it you will have bronze and silver and iron,
 all wondrously shaped and carved, beautiful to see. My father
 will happily give freely of his own wealth as well, if he
 hears his son is living, and standing far from the Argive ships."

And in answer spoke Odysseus πολύμητις :

"Don't bother with all that right now. Don't think of downhearted death
 either. But come! and tell me truly. Why do you move this way
 in the middle of the night, while the other men are asleep?"

Perhaps you're skulking around in the dark to strip the dead men of their armour? You've come here to mingle with the dead? Or are you a spy sent by Hector, to stake out our positions and our ships, which are not too far away. Or is something else on your mind?"

And Dolon, all his limbs shaking confusedly, answered him :

"Indeed, it is just as you say! Hector blinded me with hopes of wealth, and led me astray. He spoke of the wondrously shaped horses of the glorious son of Peleus, and his chariot. Who has ever seen a chariot so fine with bronze? He said he would give these to me, if I ran through the night air and come close to the enemy, and see if the ships remain as well-secured as before, or, now that our fortunes have changed, perhaps you're tired, and your guard is down, and open to attack."

And smiling at him spoke Odysseus πολύμητις :

"Those are considerable rewards you're after, the horses of Aeacus' son, the warlike. Did you think you could drive them? Achilles, born of an immortal mother, can control them, but no one else. Not you. Now tell me this : when you had your heart to heart with Hector, where exactly were you standing? And get comfortable, for my questions are many. I want to know where his arms and armour are, and his horses. You are going to describe for us the situation of the watchmen, and also the beds of many another Trojan. And before you're done here, we three will talk of Trojan plans. Are they happy to stay on the plain, standing not very far from our precious ships; or, satisfied with their good fortune, do they plan to return

to the city?"

And in answer spoke Dolon, son of Eumedes :

"I can tell you everything right now. Hector's at assembly with his ministers at the tomb of godlike Ilos, founder of Troy, away from the botheration of the camp. The guards you ask about, Great Achaean Hero—we have no watchmen devoted to the army far across the plain. The Trojans keep awake by their fires, and urge one another to keep his own watch; but the allies are asleep. They leave it to the Trojans to watch over everything, since it's not their wives and children living inside the city walls."

Then Odysseus asked him :

"These allies, do they sleep among the Trojans, or off on their own? Describe for me the situation."

And Dolon answered him :

"I can describe all that for you precisely. Out there by the sea are the Carians, and the Paeonians, the ones with those wondrously bent bows, and the Leleges, the Kaukones, and the mighty Pelasgi. Now there by Gate Thymbria lie the Lycians and the noble Mysians and the Phrygians who fight from chariots, and the Maeonians, arranger of all the chariots that ride the plain. But why do you ask me of all this? If you want to go down into the army of the Trojans I'll tell you right now what to do. Look over there a ways : see? Those are the Thracians. They are newly come,

so farthest off. Their king is Rhesus, son of Eioneus.

I know they live along the river Strymon. And Rhesus' horses are the most beautiful I've ever seen, white as snow, fast as the winds. And his chariot is carven and ornamented with gold and silver; and his golden armour is wondrously huge, and incredible to see. The armour he brought with him is not for mortal men, but for the gods who are immortal.

So then. Lead me to your lines, or tie me up and leave me here. Go find out for yourself that everything I've told you is truth."

Then Diomedes looked darkly at the man, and spoke, saying :

"Dolon, face it. There is no escaping here; though we value the facts you have given us. If we let you go to run free, soon you'll be running back on us, either as spy, or spearman. On the other hand, if I kill you now, you'll be no inconvenience later."

So he spoke, and Dolon made to speak in heated prayer, and raised his hands, but Diomedes swung his sword and sheared off the man's head clean at the neck. Still articulating it rolled away in the dust. Then they took the cap of weasel hide, and wolf skin, and bow, and spear : and while gathering these Odysseus prayed to Athena Bright-Eyes, distributor of the spoil, whispering :

*"Goddess of strength, I wish you well. Always
I praise you first of all the immortals
of Olympus. Now bring us to the beds
of the Thracian warriors."*

Thus spoke Odysseus. He lifted the spoils and put them
 by a tamarisk. He then broke some branches off and stuck them
 in the bush, as clear marks for them to see when returning through
 the black night, that was passing quick. So the two men moved swiftly,
 skilfully stepping among the fallen armour and puddled blood,
 and straightaway gained entry into the Thracian camp. Now
 all the men were asleep, wearied from the day's effort. They were
 neatly arranged in three well-ordered rows, with each warrior's
 arms and armour beside him, and also his two horses, tied
 with leather ropes to a chariot, each of ornate breastwork.
 The most beautiful of all chariots shone in the centre
 of the company. This, Odysseus saw, was the chariot
 of King Rhesus, who was asleep beside it. Odysseus
 indicated this to Diomedes, and whispered to him,
 saying :

"There's the king. So let's do it. Do you want
 to free the horses or kill all the men?
 You do one and I'll do the other."

And before Odysseus had spoken in full,
 Athena Bright-Eyes let out the fury
 in Diomedes, who began killing men
 every which way, cutting throats left and right
 and plunging his sword into their chests;
 and a groaning arose; and Diomedes dripped
 red with blood, like a lion who finds flocks
 unguarded, for the shepherd is gone, and rushes
 upon the goats or the sheep with horror in heart;
 so rushed Diomedes through the rows, visiting
 death upon twelve men. Odysseus, meanwhile,

dragged away each dead man by the foot from behind,
 and left them to one side, so that the fine horses,
 when he led them away through the depleted ranks,
 might not hesitate in fear, and trouble him among
 a mess of dead bodies, for he was unknown to them.

When Tydeus' son stood by the king, he saw
 the sleeping man gasping for breath in a nightmare
 of some kind, but if it were an omen, the man
 didn't read it right, for Diomedes robbed him
 of honey-sweet life, and he became the thirteenth
 dead man piled to the side. Odysseus then
 freed his horses, tied their reins together, and led
 them out and away, prodding them with the tip
 of a bow, for he didn't think to take the whip
 from the chariot-box, as πολύμητις never
 fought on chariots in battle. As he moved out,
 he whistled a sign to δῖος Diomedes.

But Diomedes lingered among the carnage,
 considering what next horror to deliver :
 to take the chariot, full of wondrously
 ornamented arms and armour, rolling it out
 by the pole, or lifting it up over his head
 and walking out; or should he add to the death-pile
 of Thracians? While he wondered all this, Athena
 came near and spoke to δῖος Diomedes, saying :

"Think of returning to the ships now, son of great-hearted Tydeus.
 If some other god alerts the Trojans, you'll be leaving in a hurry."

Thus spoke goddess Athena; and Diomedes knew the sound
 of her voice, so he quickly untied the rest of the horses,
 even as he heard the enemy starting to come awake;
 then mounted one, and Odysseus leapt onto another;
 and all galloped swiftly back to the ships of the Achaeans.

And it would be as Athena had predicted to her friend :
 for far-shooting Apollo was in no way inattentive
 to all this destruction by the Argives. He burned with anger
 to see Athena collaborating with Diomedes.
 So he went down into the Trojan multitude, and mingled
 with the army, and prodded awake Thracian minister
 Hippocoön, a noble relation of the now-dead king.

This man opened his eyes on the spot now bereft of the fine
 horses of the king. And when he jumped out of bed he saw worse :
 he discovered himself standing in grisly carnage, and heard
 painful noises of men struggling in death. Then he wailed
 aloud, and cried out the name of his excellent king and friend.
 And the Trojans heard his cry, and confusion indescribable
 broke out as one and another rushed this way and that. Many
 came to gaze on the memorably awful work, done by men
 now here, now gone, and now already returning to their ships.

Those two now came to the place on the plain where the dead body
 of Hector's spy lay without its head. Odysseus restrained
 the fast-galloping horses, and bloodstained Diomedes jumped
 to the ground and recovered the spoils still dripping with gore
 that had leaked from the opened neck. Then he remounted his horse
 and the pair rushed on, flying toward their ships, and soon they were there.
 And Nestor was the first to remark on the sound of horses

approaching, and spoke out for all to hear :

“My good men, am I wrong, or is the sound of fast-galloping horses in the air, and coming our way? Have Odysseus and Diomedes brought terror to the Trojans already? And have they sent us a prize of what sounds like many horses? Oh, but for a fear at heart I cannot keep quiet : I fear these bravest of Argives suffered something terrible over there.”

But even as he spoke his words were drowned out by the cheering of men, as the two warriors emerged into sight, with white horses galloping out of the night with them. Odysseus and Diomedes jumped down to earth, and the men around them embraced their shoulders kindly, and welcomed them in great joy, and many victorious words.

And Nestor spoke, for all to hear :

“Do tell me, o much-praised Odysseus, great glory of our people, how in the world did two men take all of these horses? Did you two warriors go down into the enemy lines? Truthfully, now—were they gifts of a god? These are wondrous to see; they glow like sunbeams! I’ve had many dealings with Trojans—no one sees me sitting by the ships, as any aged man might prefer to do, but still I fight, and have seen much : horses like these, however—I’ve never imagined such a sight. Come now and tell us true : they were gifts of a god. You met one on the way. Everyone knows the daughter of Zeus cloud-gatherer loves you both, the virgin goddess herself, Athena Bright-Eyes.”

And Odysseus πολύμητις answered him :

“Nestor, son of Neleus, great glory of our people, a god
could have given us these horses, as gods can do as they please.
But these horses are fresh from Thrace, and Diomedes killed
their king and twelve of his men, and we took these for our trouble;
and another man lies dead on the plain, a spy that Hector
sent out to scout our plans.”

So spoke Odysseus, then laughingly drove the horses in
to the trench then out the other side, and all the Achaeans
joyfully went with him. When they arrived at the well-composed
tent of the son of Tydeus, they stalled the white horses in
with Diomedes’ own, which were standing there, eating sweet corn.
Odysseus, meanwhile, placed the gory spoils of Dolon
on the stern of his ship, preparatory to an offering
to Athena goddess. Then the two men walked into the sea
and washed away the sweat and the blood from their legs and the back
of their necks and all the rest of them. When the waves of the sea
had washed away the sweat and the blood from their skin, and their hearts
were relaxed, they next stepped into bathtubs of fresh water,
and were bathed. Then, when the two were bathed, and glimmering with rich
oil all over their skin, they sat down to an early breakfast,
where first they drew from the full mixing-bowl and poured the honey-
sweet wine to Athena.

End of Book X

Book XI

Dawn rose from the side of her lover Tithonus, the hapless immortal-but-ageing Tithonus, to spread light across sky and earth for hapless immortals and mortals alike. And Zeus released Chaos onto the Achaean ships, apocalyptic horror, her hands holding an omen of war, a grey rainbow, whose end touched down by Odysseus' black wide-bellied ship, where she stood, there at the central point, with Ajax at one end, and Achilles at the other, and she opened her mouth wide, the terrible goddess, and shrieked out her cry at a high pitch that cut the heart of each Achaean warrior, and filled each with unspeakable strength and an implacable will to wage war and to fight. And so it was that war became sweeter to these men than any hope of their oar-waving ships sailing home.

And incorporated in her cry was Agamemnon's shout to the Argives to arm themselves for combat, heavy combat. And standing there for all to see the commander of the army got into his glittering bronze armour. First he fixed his leg-plates into place with clasps : as much artwork as armour, they were finished with silver ankle-guards. Next he put about his chest a breast-plate given by his friend Cinyras as a guest-gift. When far away in Island Cyprus he heard the rumour of the great expedition of Achaean ships readying for Troy, he thereafter gave him the breast-plate, as a token of honour and of good hope. Staring into this piece of body armour could make hostile eyes lose focus, so intricate it was, complicatedly so, and vivid with aggressive colour. A stripe pattern of alternating quality and colour ran horizontally up and down: ten bands of lapis lazuli,

twelve of gold, and twenty of tin. And there were several widths to these bands, intermixed as an oscillation to wobble one's eyesight. And cutting across the stripe pattern vertically were many snakes, three inlaid to the left, and three on the right, with their many forked tongues lashing out at his neck, and bodies sinuous as the rainbows that Zeus summons to glow among the clouds as an omen to mortal men. And he flung his sword round his shoulders, his weapon studded with gold that threw back sunlight sharp enough to blind an enemy long enough to die. But for now the sword was sheathed in a silver scabbard that hung down from golden chains. And he took up his protective shield, his brave friend in battle; and to gaze into it was to travel in to concentric circles leading to two eyes of rubies that glowed deadly-red in sunlight. These were the eyes of the grim-faced Gorgon, a horrifying sight surrounded by ten bronze rings radiating outward and expanding along the way, and in among them were twenty rings of tin, the rare material of tin, and one ring of blue lazuli. This last encompassed that face that chills, and dispirits, and demoralizes, and freezes : the Gorgon, glaring with her glowing red eyes. Staring into the shield inspired thoughts of unruly terror and panic. The shield was aggression, the shield was protection, the shield was singularity, the shield was art—even its handle was ornate and terrifying, both : made of solid silver, it was inlaid with a vile serpent of lapis lazuli which had three heads growing out from one neck, one throat. The three heads coiled each round the others in an hypnotic pattern, and the feel of it under the fingers gave the hand strength. And on his head he fixed his fearsome helmet, furnished with four bosses, each as long as a wild boar's tusk, to deflect crushing blows. And at the apex aspired a plume of horsehair that shuddered

with unnerving colour. And he took two long death-bringing spears,
 their sharp tips of bronze sending a glimmer up into heaven,
 where Athena and Hera sat, peering down. So the two roused
 thunder, to honour the king of golden Mycenae.

The heavily-armed foot-soldiers of the Achaean army
 marched forward up to the trench; then went down inside, and began
 moving through the thicket of spikes stuck upright there. The drivers
 of the chariots, meanwhile, brought their horses to the edge
 of the trench and lined up, and had to restrain their horses' desire
 to bolt. There the Achaean leaders waited. And sounds came up
 from down within the trench that joined as one towering cry while
 Dawn spread her light; for Zeus up in Heaven held out his arms wide,
 and a rain of blood fell through his fingers, and spilled down the sky
 and showered the warriors, who cried out in confusion
 in their cramped space, and the clamour made the horses shake and snort.
 So the Olympian sky dripped blood because Zeus had a point
 to make : the heads of many men would be tossed into Hades
 today, and all that excellence lost.

And, ahead of them, the Trojan army, man by man, appeared
 upon the rising ground of the Scamander plain. They, bristling
 with sharpest weaponry, looked down on their god-cursed enemy,
 eager to kill them all. At the front of their lines stood Hector,
 fiercest Trojan warrior; and with him stood wild Polydamas;
 and most honoured Aeneas, whom the people looked to as a god.
 Also standing tall in front were the three sons of Antenor,
 oldest friend and wisest counsellor to Priam, king of Troy :
 his sons were Polybus, whom all men knew his hands alone tore
 men apart limb from limb; and Agenor, whose very name itself
 derived from the Greek word for 'fight' (ἀγών), also for the agony

and anguish that confuses one's mind, and *antagonism* simply put; and the third son was young Acamas, beautiful as an immortal. So δῖος Hector stood before his army, his massive shield raised before him, a perfectly balanced contrivance, and a perfect circle. Just as the clouds drift aside to reveal a star of ill-omen terribly glittering, then come to overshadow it again, so Hector appeared and re-appeared, first here, then there, giving commands to his men among the lines. So from afar the Trojan army looked to crackle with lightning whenever the bronze-coated Hector showed himself, for the sunlight flashed from his armour like the lightning of Zeus Orderer.

And just as two reapers in thriving competition cut twin swathes through the wheat or barley of a rich man's field, and the handfuls cut by the sickle fall fast : just so did the Trojans and Achaeans cut into each other with vigour, and in the havoc of blood no one thought to think of flight, for flight meant final obliteration; so they charged, and fought like wolves, and the brawl took many heads on both sides. And Chaos Goddess Iris laughed, looking on all the colours of combat, particularly the red blood flowing; and laughed at the sound of many groans. Chaos was the only god there. All the other gods were away from the war, resting at ease, free from care in their own space, each in a ravine of deep Olympus. They pointed to Zeus as the cause of all the noise, dropping all the blame on the Storm-Cloud God, portraying themselves as innocents in the origins of the blood-bath, now that the Trojans were close to victory. How laughable, the so-called glory of mortals 'victorious'! Zeus Orderer, however, didn't give a flying fuck what the other ones

said or thought. He stayed away from everyone, all their hateful rubbish; and sat at ease in his majesty, and looked down on the city of Troy and the well-built Achaean ships, on the bronze strobing across the plain like little lightning specks; and Zeus the God of Time observed both the living and the dead.

So long as the burning sun rose ever higher, light intensified on the plain, and the hour reached nine, then ten in the morning; so long as the spears and arrows passing each other in air hit their marks, so long did the men keep falling; but at that hour, just past ten, when a woodman, his arms wearied with work after toppling many tall trees, has had enough of swinging the axe, and prepares a meal in his mountain vale spot, and desire for sweet food takes hold of his heart : just then the Danaans broke through the enemy lines of battle, and called to their fellow soldiers to follow them in. And Agamemnon went forward, hacking his way through the enemy with the foremost of his men, and came to stand before Bienor, Trojan warrior and leader. Agamemnon reached out and tore the man off his chariot-board, and by the time he hit the ground he was dead. Then he faced the dead man's charioteer, the soon-to-be-dead Oïleus, who jumped down from the chariot with spear in hand; and he chose to run at Agamemnon king of men, whose own spear went straight through the Trojan's helmet right into his soft brain, and the man's head became a mishmash of shattered skull and scrambled brains, there inside his helmet of bronze. So that was that for that man. And Agamemnon tore off their armour and flung it aside then went further and ripped off their tunics, exposing their bare bodies to the air as a one last bitter humiliation. So Agamemnon stepped over their bodies, then stripped Isos and Antiphos of their lives, two of King Priam's sons, the one

illegitimate and the other a child of wedlock,
 the two of them occupying one chariot : the bastard
 kept to the board and held the reins, but excellent Antiphos
 had leapt to earth to face army commander Agamemnon,
 who knew these two Trojans. Once upon a time δῖος Achilles
 had tied them both up hand-and-foot with willow shoots, when he crept
 up on them while they herded their sheep through the foothills of Ida,
 and then paraded the pair alongside the Achaean ships,
 after carrying them all the way from Ida; but he set
 them free after a ransom was paid. But now Agamemnon
 took their freedom : he ran a spear into the chest of Isos
 then yanked it back out, and before hapless Antiphos knew it,
 Agamemnon's sword penetrated his ear, which flung him
 back out of the chariot and into the dust. Then the victor
 rapidly stripped off their armour and tossed it aside as if
 it were filth. As a lion easily crunches up the young
 ones of a swift deer, when he takes them with his powerful jaws
 and haplessly breaks their necks, and robs them of their lives, when just
 before they'd been asleep in bed : and the mother hears it all
 because by chance she had come by her lair, but cannot rescue
 her children, and on herself comes a terrible quivering
 and she can do nothing but run through the crackling underbrush
 and the woods, hurrying quick as she can, and sweating, and hears
 the coming of the terrible creature behind her : so now
 the Trojans were in panic flight from the Argives.

Then he took on Peisander and Hippolochus, two unyielding
 warriors who would soon yield to king of men Agamemnon.
 They were the sons of wise Antimachus, and for their pains in
 combat they hoped to get gifts of gold, splendid gifts, from Paris,
 so chafed at Helen being returned to 'bland' Menelaus.

Master of men Agamemnon took them both on together,
 for they stood together in one chariot, and their four arms
 were all mixed-up and panic-stricken after their reins had slipped
 from their hands, and their two horses were galloping wildly.
 So he charged at them through the commotion like a lion, the son
 of Atreus, and the two helpless ones called to him, and their words
 were to Agamemnon as the bleating of sheep as they said :

“Take us alive, son of Atreus, and take into your hands a
 wondrous ransom! Our father Antimachus has many treasures
 inside his palace, beautiful bronze and gold and iron objects,
 and immense wealth is yours if you bring us captive to your ships!”

So with weeping and wailing the two heroes spoke to the king,
 but cruel was his reply :

“You call yourselves the sons of ‘wise’ Antimachus?
 Not the Antimachus who unwisely tried to kill my brother?
 And strong Odysseus besides? When they came to deliver
 a message from the Achaeans, and nothing more? *This now is
 the something more*—you get to suffer for your father’s insult.”

So Agamemnon reached out and tore Peisander from the chariot
 and forced him heavily onto the ground, put his foot on his neck,
 and speared him through the heart. And Hippolochus sprung down
 from the board, and when he hit the ground Agamemnon sheared off
 both his arms, then severed his head and knocked it away, so it
 rolled like a round stone through the jostling bodies of warriors
 fighting. And Agamemnon followed it deep into the turbulence
 of confused Trojan battlelines breaking down, charging on the

enemy along with his well-armoured Achaeans. Around
 him his foot-forces carved up the Trojans fleeing in blind panic,
 while the Trojan charioteers were being likewise routed
 by the Argive drivers; and from under everything, the feet
 and the hooves and the wheels, arose the dust of the plain,
 as if the plain entire exhaled one tremendous sigh
 of dust. And from inside the cloud came the voice of ruler, lord,
 and master Agamemnon, slaughterer of men, calling out
 for his Argives to follow. As when fire falls upon thick
 woodlands and is whirled by winds every which way and spreads out
 its destruction wide, and whole thickets of trees—root and branch—fall
 under the rush of flame : just so under Agamemnon fell
 many enemy warriors; and many fast-flowing horses
 pulled empty chariots rattling along, for their charioteers
 lay dead on the earth, sweeter now to vultures than to wives.

Elsewhere in the confusion of arrows and spears and spreading dust
 cloud, in among the slaughter and the blood and the horrible
 cold-hearted noise of carnage, Hector hacked his way forward through
 the mess, and Zeus saw him; but not yet did he visit δῖος
 Hector. Instead, he watched the son of Atreus call fiercely
 to his men to follow him after the best of the Trojans.

The Achaean army struggled past the ancient tomb of Ilos,
 its stone discoloured and crumbling now, as they pushed forward
 across the plain, striving to take the city; and all the while
 Agamemnon kept up his frenzied screaming, harsh as a bird
 of prey; and his all-dominating hands and head and body
 were drenched in gore. So the Argive warriors reached the Scaean
 gate, and all the city shuddered terrified inside. But there
 by the oak tree the Achaeans stopped, and waited for the rest

of their army to catch up to them. So the Trojans stopped, too; and both took a breath. But back on the plain Death still prevailed as Trojans fled in panic, like cattle scattering from a lion coming in the dead of night : all have spread wide over the field, but one has been chosen, and it comes up quick : her neck is caught in mighty teeth and crushed, and death pulls her into its depths. Then the lion laps up the blood and gulps down the entrails.

Just so did master of men Agamemnon rush back to battle; just so did master of men Agamemnon slaughter like cattle all Trojans before him, rushing on them and cutting down from behind all those running from him. Indeed, they fled in terror. And fell on their faces, or on their backs, when Agamemnon thrust his spear this way or that in a rage to make the head swim : and he bathed exultant in torrents of blood. Then he decided to storm the city and bring down the walls, so Agamemnon turned back : then it was that Zeus, father of gods and men, heavily sighed, there where he sat on the summit of Ida, among its peaks spilling with spring-water; and in his hands he held lightning. He urged golden-winged Iris to convey a message with haste :

“Quickly now, my Iris wind-walker, scoot down and go among them and deliver a thought to Hector :

For as long as Hector sees Agamemnon raving along, slashing through enemy lines, leading his men; for just that long let Hector hold back, and command his warriors to scuffle with the enemy in front of him, slicing each other up in awful combat.

But when Hector sees Agamemnon wounded by spear or arrow,

and jumps onto his chariot to flee, just then will Hector advance with strength that I shall give him, to mangle and kill all the way across the plain back to the Achaean ships.

By this time, all this to-and-froing up and down the plain will have reached the hour of dusk, and Helios will go down under the earth to do what he likes in the dark, and both armies will rest from all this cockeyed coming and going. This is my word. Go now, dear Iris, and deliver this message to Hector."

Thus spoke Zeus, and Iris heard and obeyed. She stepped down the air to come beside war-wise Hector standing in his shining chariot, and the cloud-walking Iris whispered in the warrior's ear :

"Hector, Priam's son, sharp as Zeus in thought, Zeus indeed has sent me here to deliver this message : hold back until you see a wounded Agamemnon mounting his chariot. Just then, advance back across the plain to the precious Achaean ships, with strength that Zeus shall grant you, until the sun goes down."

So she spoke, then stepped away, the quick-footed Iris; and Hector jumped to the ground, making his armour rattle round him; and holding two lethal spears he went every which way through his army, rousing them to fight, rousing the horrible clamour of war. So his men turned round and faced the Achaeans with their backs to the Scaean gate, forming close ranks, ready to defend their city to the last.

And Agamemnon came on across the distance between the lines of the two armies, ready to fight in front of everyone.

Speak now, Muses, who live on Olympus, and give me

who it was who first came forward to face Agamemnon.

Was it a Trojan? Or a courageous warrior ally?

It was Iphidamas, son of Antenor, well-built and brave,
 who was raised among the rich soil of Thrace, the fertile
 spot of many flocks. His mother was beautiful-cheeked Theano,
 but from a young age he was raised by his grandfather Cisseus,
 his mother's father, and lived in his house, and grew to manhood,
 ready to enjoy his full measure of life. Cisseus, however,
 desired him to stay, and offered him his second daughter;
 so Iphidamas married his maternal aunt, his mother's sister.
 But he left the bridal chamber soon after, joining in with
 the defence of the rise of the Achaeans, with twelve black ships
 with him. These ships were now propped up at Percote,
 for practical Iphidamas presumed to keep his ships safe,
 and had come on foot to Ilium. But now he stood before
 Agamemnon, king of men, dense with the blood of perverse
 Atreus. And so they came up to one another, and the king
 of men missed : his spear was knocked away by Iphidamas,
 who slipped close, feinting with his own spear, then, aiming for a spot
 under the breast-plate, he felt his dagger prick Agamemnon,
 and Iphidamas leaned into the thrust with all of his weight,
 his life depending on the strength of his hand : but he was un-
 able to pierce through the warrior's belt—the dagger snapped in two
 against the eye-blinding solid-silver guard like weak black lead.
 Meanwhile Iphidamas had his spear torn from his fingers :
 Agamemnon, moving swiftly as a lion in a frenzy,
 flung the spear aside, and Iphidamas felt a sword drive in
 to his throat, and all his breath ran out of him. Agamemnon
 put him to sleep forever. Miserable youth!—leaving his
 wife's bed cold to come here to support his homeland,

the wife whom he had enjoyed for one night only
 as husband of the house, and to whom he had given
 much : first a hundred head of cattle; then promised
 her a thousand head of goats and sheep together,
 once he got to work and built his fortune : but Agamemnon
 took his hopes away. Moreover he stripped the dead man
 of his armour, which he tossed aside, then went his way
 back toward the army of the Achaeans.

But Antenor had many sons fighting there at Troy who were
 distinguished as mighty warriors. Coön was one of his
 sons, and when he saw his brother fall, then tears spilled from his eyes.
 Now Coön was mighty in trickery, and with spear in hand
 he snuck up unseen on Agamemnon, keeping to one side
 of the king's eyeline. Coön thrust his lethal spear at δῖος
 Agamemnon, who saw its tip sparkling in the corner
 of his eye and turned to look, but it was too late : the bright bronze
 stabbed his arm under his elbow and ran in, and the sharp tip
 broke through the other side. Coön then tore out the hateful spear,
 and blood streamed out from both ends of δῖος Agamemnon's wound.

But Agamemnon barely felt the wound penetrate his rage,
 and fought on, his smooth wooden spear in hand, and sprang at Coön.
 This hapless man was reaching out to drag his brother's body,
 dead son of Antenor, off the field of battle, all the while
 screaming for the Trojan warriors to rise up, but then he
 felt Agamemnon's indomitable spear pass straight through him,
 and all his body went weak : so the one dead brother fell on
 to the other. Agamemnon then came near and cut his head
 off over Iphidamas' body. Thus did these two sons
 of Antenor come to meet the king of men, Agamemnon,

who brought them to the end of their full measure of life;
and together they entered the house of Hades.

And Agamemnon ranged along the Trojan lines, looking for
a chance to fight, but the men shied away from him,
and he'd raise his spear first at one, then at another, then dismiss
each with a sneer and stalk on, letting them live among the spears
and swords and sharp stones slinging though the airborne dust.
Agamemnon fought while the blood spilled from his wound; but by
the time the blood had clotted at both ends of his arm, then pain
overawed raging Atreus' son. Just as women in labour
writhe in the appalling pains that the Eileithyiai send,
the goddesses of childbirth, the daughters of Queen Hera
that dispense bitter birth-pangs : just so were the pains running through
Agamemnon. He went swiftly up onto his chariot
and commanded his driver to ride to the ships; for to raise
his killing arm brought pain terrible to bear, and exhausting.

So he screamed out in rage; then shouted at his men :

"Argives! Leaders and ministers! Zeus takes me away!
But we fight on! Do not let them get to the ships!"

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and his driver cracked the whip
at the horses and they launched forward eager to fly,
their manes flowing in the air, and the foam from their jaws
spattering their breasts; and the dust rising up from the plain
stained their bellies as they brought the king out and away.

When Hector saw Agamemnon go out of the cloud of dust,
he called aloud to his men, shouting out :

“All Trojans! Lycians! Dardanians! Be men
 now! Think of strength and courage! and kill them all now!
 Their best man is gone! Zeus promises us a great victory!
 Drive your horses right at them, so we may have our victory!”

So he spoke, and encouraged battle-rage and an appetite
 for blood in each man. As when a hunter sets salivating
 dogs after a wild boar or lion, so man-destroying
 Hector, friend to Ἄρης, set his colossally enraged army
 onto the Argives. He then himself ran forward through the ranks
 till he reached the front lines, then leapt into combat as a storm
 rushes in, bringing convulsions to the violet sea.

Tell us how many lives Hector stripped from the earth.
 Who was first to die, who was last? when Zeus granted
 Hector glory, for awhile. First killed was Asaeos, then
 Autonoös, καὶ Opites, καὶ Dolops, son of Clytius,
 καὶ Opheltios, τε Agelaos, τε Oros τ’ Hipponoös μενε-
 χάρμης, “who stood his ground, high on war”. These Danaan leaders
 he brought down, then kicked their bodies away; and leapt headlong in
 to the indiscriminate crowd to kill more, anyone. Just as
 the West Wind knocks aside the clouds riding the brightening South
 Wind, hammering them with a tempest of wind and heavy rain,
 and roils the sea into swollen waves rolling along, and
 sea-spray smashes into the air amid the whistling of the
 far-roving winds : just as stormy was the rage of Hector stalking
 the plain; and many Argive heads were brought to earth.

Thus, the Achaeans were tipped toward total obliteration;
 and that would have been that, for all of them, and all their precious

ships burnt to ash, had not Odysseus come up alongside
the son of Tydeus, to say :

“Diomedes, why is this happening to us? Our strength is
gone! Fuck it. We’ll stand together. We’re not dying like cowards
when that Ἄρης - loving Hector comes to pulverize our ships.”

And Diomedes answered him :

“I’m with you. We’ll have our pleasure for a short time at least,
since all-glorious Zeus prefers to give them the victory.”

And as he spoke he pushed Thymbraeus out of his chariot;
and when he hit the ground he felt Diomedes’ spear sink
deep into his left breast. And Odysseus killed his servant,
Molon. They left this royal pair to lie by their ornamented
chariot, since now they were forever retired from combat;
then charged deeper into the turbulence of warriors, adding
to the confusion : as when two wild boars fall viciously
on hunting dogs : just so did the godlike pair cut their way
through many a Trojan, leaving many severed body parts
in their wake; though the Argive army itself kept retreating
further back toward their ships, under Hector’s relentless attack.

At any rate Odysseus and Diomedes leapt on
to an enemy chariot and grappled with its two men,
the two sons of Merops of Percote, celebrated as
well-skilled in the art of prophecy. This man had not allowed
his sons to march into man-consuming war; but they would not
hear him, because the goddesses of death were leading them on;
and now the black goddesses had their triumph : for Diomedes

stole their spirit and breath away, and their ostentatious armour.
 Odysseus, meanwhile, had leapt off to strike down two men
 of his own : Hippodamus καὶ Hypeirochus.

And so it was that at this time Zeus Orderer laid out evenly
 the odds of victory, as he watched from on high, atop Ida :
 where long ago two wood nymphs Ida and Adrasteia raised
 him when an infant, among the peaks and vales of the sacred
 mountain range. Later, to honour them, he rewarded them thrones
 in the night air, where they glimmer eternally as constellations.
 But the duration of the passage from infant to god was
 arduous at best; so the duration of the passage from
 infant to old man must be worse to experience, and it is.
 For instance, just now Zeus watched these men killing one another.

He saw Agastrophus struck by the spear of Diomedes,
 leaving a wound gushing blood from his hip; and far-away Zeus
 heard the scrape of bronze on bone. But the wounded warrior had
 nowhere to flee, for he had kept his horses far from the fight,
 thinking himself a practical man. So he had to flee on foot,
 and was dead before long. And the servant minding his horses
 outside the battle cloud stood there patiently with the horses,
 who would never see their master again. But Hector caught sight
 of both Tydeus' son and Odysseus, and charged at them
 with a shrieking of awful war, and with him came the front line
 of the Trojan battle-array. Diomedes saw Hector
 coming, and leaned in close to Odysseus to say :

“Here he comes. We'll stand and take him together. What do you think?”

And Odysseus replied :

“Okay.”

So he spoke, while Diomedes aimed his long spear and threw it, and hit the mark. Hector was hit on the helmet, but its bronze deflected the shot, which did not pierce bare skin, for his helmet was a wondrous device of three layers, a gift from Apollo.

So the spear bounced off, but the blow made Hector stagger, and he saw stars, and went down to one knee amid the jostling throng of warriors clashing, and stayed there, with his strong hand touching the earth; and, as he struggled to compose himself, night began to seep into his eyes. Meanwhile Diomedes charged forward, intent on finishing him off, shoving warriors this way and that out of his way heading to Hector. But by the time he reached where his spear had hit, Hector was gone. He had revived, found his chariot, and was now riding out of the dust cloud even as Diomedes stood dumbfounded at the empty space. And so this time Hector leader of Trojans escaped black death.

And Diomedes shouted out into the air :

“Run, dog, or I’ll kick you again! Run to Apollo
and pray, because without him you’d be dead!
But he’s not the only god in the sky!
When you see me again I will kill you!
We too have gods who stand with us!
Now I’ll kill your men left and right!”

Thus Diomedes, while stripping the armour off the ghastly corpse of Agastrophus, once celebrated as a war-god, but now just humanly dead. All this was happening hard-by

the tomb of Ilos, the memorial built of mortal hands
 long ago in obsolete times, and now crumbling piece by
 piece; but once Ilos was a leader of the people and Troy.
 Now just there stood Alexandros, husband to lovely Helen,
 lurking with his bow; and while Diomedes was wasting
 time and energy tearing the glimmering corselet off
 his victim, to pile it onto the shield already torn
 off the shoulder, and also the heavy helmet, just then
 did Alexandros string an arrow, and pull it back to his chin;
 and he aimed it at Diomedes, and then he let it fly;
 and it was no idle shot that sprang from his hands. Diomedes
 felt the arrow pass though his foot and break out the other side,
 his right foot; and he saw the goddamn arrow stick itself in
 the dirt before him, and the blood began to flow from his wound.
 And Paris jumped into the air with a sweet laugh; and from his
 ambush he shouted big talk for the Argive hero to hear :

“Hit! That was no idle shot I let fly!
 If only I’d struck you in the belly
 and taken your life!—So might the Trojans
 have a rest from killing, who fear you as
 lions fear a goat!”

And mighty Diomedes replied, feeling no fear as he
 started out ever-so-slowly toward Paris, step by step :

“You talk big when standing far off, you filthy woman-fucker.
 Come down here and try me face to face; then your bow would be use-
 less, and your arrows good for nothing but sticking up your ass.
 As vain of your curling crown of hair as a girl, so you boast
 over a scratch! This love-tap you gave me makes me laugh, you im-

becile. Did it fly from a woman? or an idiot child?

Weak is the shot sent by a weakling, a cowardly nothing
of a man.”

And as he spoke he moved ever closer to Paris, saying :

“Come to me now, warrior, and my lightest touch will break you.
Then you can take your place among the dead. Then your lovely wife
can tear her cheeks in grief, and your children grow up fatherless,
while you rot where you lie. Then more birds will whirl around you
than women; and they will chew all your vaunted beauty away.”

Thus spoke angry Diomedes, but before he reached Paris,
Odysseus had followed the trail of blood to his friend,
and held him back. And Diomedes understood, and sat down
on the earth to assess his inconvenient wound, and scorching
pain rushed through the passages of his body. So Odysseus
took up where Diomedes left off, while Diomedes
jumped up onto a chariot and commanded the driver
to get them the hell out of there, and head for the ships. And all
the while he stood furious that he had to leave the fight.

Now Odysseus stood alone, holding his spear, on the earth
left bare by the Achaeans retreating in their panic flight.

Then with a deep sigh he spoke out to himself, saying :

“ὦ μοι ! What the hell do I do now? The whole goddamn army
is running away in fear. It’s a cold thing to die alone.

Zeus, why have you done this? But why am I talking to myself?

So be it. Let me find the best and bravest there is of them.

And he better stand strong, or I'm sending him straight to hell."

While he raced through that in mind and heart, the Trojans came up to surround him, their shields and spears raised, seemingly cutting off all hope of escape, and promising him a great misery.

And just as dogs and youths in the prime of their strength chase a boar, closing in from two sides, and he races through the deep thickets, whetting his lower tusk with his upper one, sharpening it for battle, and his gnashing jaws are a warning; yet still they come on strong, however fearful he looks; even so the Trojans pressed in round Odysseus, who had no choice now but to fight, or die. So excellent Deïopites had his fighting arm sliced off before he knew it, then were Thoön καὶ Eunomus hacked up and their pieces all mingled together in the dirt. And Chersidamas as he attempted the heroic move of leaping from his chariot was speared through the belly while still in the air, and came down to earth already dying, and he grasped with his fingers at the plain, as he lay writhing on the ground, and when he died his fingers slowly opened to reveal the dust of the earth he'd gathered there. He left those two dead men there, then took down Charops with his long death-bringing spear. And Socus, brother to Charops, both massive men in size, ran up to bring help, and spoke out to Odysseus as he came :

"Odysseus! Well-known in thought and deed! Now neither will help you! I'm sticking this spear into you and taking your life. Then I'll own you forever."

And as he spoke he pushed his spear deep into Odysseus' shield. The lethal spear-point forced through all the layers of his cover,

heavy shield and intricately-carven breastplate and all else,
 and headed into him to ruin the inward parts of his chest.
 But Athena Bright-Eyes knocked it aside and the bronze tip sheared
 off all the skin from his side instead and stuck fast there. And then
 Odysseus, knowing he wasn't dead yet, drew back and spoke :

"Away, you sack of guts! Watch me spill them out onto the earth
 for you; for death is here. You may have taken me out of the fight
 for now, but I'm taking you out of life for ever. These hands
 shall now toss you to the champion rapist of the Underworld."

And as Odysseus was speaking, Socus turned round to flee,
 but as he made his first step, he was spun back round
 and took Odysseus' spear straight through his heart
 and out his back, and fell with a clatter at Odysseus' feet.

So Odysseus came to stand over Socus, planting one
 foot on either side of the dying man, and he spoke, saying :

"Glorious Socus, son of somebody, you can't outrun death.
 Think of it, as you breathe your last in my face : your dear parents
 —your honourable father, your sweet-hearted mother—will not
 bury you with respect, nor ever close your eyelids with loving
 fingers. No, Socus, yours is a more miserable fate.
 The birds will root around inside you, and pull out your entrails,
 and enjoy a good dinner. (But you won't feel the wind of their wings
 flapping around you.) I may die here with you, but my body
 will be honoured; and, dead though I'll be, I can live with that."

Thus spoke mighty warlike Odysseus, who then yanked the spear
 out of his body, then out of his shield. Then he saw the blood

pour from his wound, and he was furious at heart to see it.

The Trojan warriors crowding around him turned ferocious when they saw the blood flowing, and called out to each other to charge at him together at once. But somehow Odysseus eluded their grasp and then he let out a cry, he let out as much sound as a man's head can hold, and Menelaus heard, and straightaway turned to Ajax, who stood nearby, and spoke out :

"Ajax! Zeus-born champion of men! I just heard Odysseus cry out! I fear he's been caught, or at least cut off from us. Come now! We must find him! Saving him is imperative! If we lose Odysseus we may very well lose it all."

So he spoke, rushing toward the cry, and Ajax followed close behind. They found Odysseus surrounded by Trojans. Just as jackals in the mountains gather round a horned stag hindered by a wound from an arrow sent from the string of a hunter; from him, though, the deer escapes, and runs through the woods for as long as the blood flows warm, and the legs have strength to move; but when, at last, the sharp arrow subdues the deer, then do the jackals come round and tear the raw flesh apart, and enjoy the deer-meat in a shady bower; but then God brings on a ravening lion, and the jackals scatter in haste, and he himself devours the carcass : just so did Odysseus scatter the Trojans attempting to cut him down, and forcefully held back a pitiless fate. Then the tremendous Ajax came before the Trojans, who shuddered at his size, and scattered yet further away in all directions, leaving Odysseus to take a breath. Ajax's famous shield was thick as a wall, and enemy warriors often had second thoughts when they saw him. Meanwhile, fast-moving Menelaus led Odysseus

off the field of battle, and called for his horses and chariot,
to bring Odysseus back to the ships.

Then Trojan Doryclus, another bastard son of Priam,
saw nothing of Ajax until his long sword plunged deep
into his heart; only then he saw the Argive hero, and died.
Then Ajax brought Lysander and Pyrasus and Pylartes
all down to Hades with a few lightning-quick strikes of his hand.
As when a river swollen with heavy rain and melting snow
comes tearing down a mountainside as a torrent driven by
Zeus' tumultuous storms, and rips many a dry oak tree
and many a pine right out of their roots, and carries it all,
the natural wrack and ruin, down into the deep salt sea,
where all is lost; just so on that long ago day did Ajax
stream wildly over the plain, brilliant in armour and power,
killing both horses and men. Many warriors that day felt
themselves torn apart limb from limb by his invincible hands.

Meanwhile, Trojan leader Hector knew nothing of Ajax's
mayhem, for he was grappling hand-to-hand with Achaeans
by the banks of the river Scamander, where many heads kept
splashing into the waters. And a warrior cry arose
along the Trojan lines until all voices joined as one cry
that shook the sky (compelling Zeus Supreme to peer down on them
for a moment), as the enemy crowded round excellent
Nestor and Ἄρης - loving Idomeneus. Just there, Hector
engaged in many memorably terrible deaths, with spear
and sword and chariot and all else, and he eliminated
whole lines of warrior youths. Even so, the Achaeans pushed
back, and would have held position there by the bloody river,
had not Alexandros appeared again with his sneaky bow.

Argive Helen's husband strung a three-barbed arrow on its string and brought an end to the Argive charge, by striking its leader Machaon in his right shoulder. Then the Achaeans breathed fear that this excellent man might be killed then and there. So Nestor heard the voice of Idomeneus calling to him :

"Nestor! Get up on that chariot and bring Machaon out of here! Drive the horses fast as you can! Get him to a healer to cut out the arrow and apply some *pharmakon*! Do it now!"

So spoke the younger man, and Nestor heard and obeyed. He stepped up onto the chariot-board, and Machaon leapt up beside him with the arrow sticking out of him. Nestor snapped the whip and the two horses flew wondrously quick out of the dust cloud.

Now, the battlefield was a patchwork of inconsistency. Here, the Achaeans dominated. There, the Trojans were in the ascendant. Thus the Trojan Cebriones, where he stood, beheld astonished how quickly battles turn. He stepped up to Hector standing in his chariot, and said :

"Hector, we're engaging with the Danaans here on the edge of the battle, but over there other Trojans are moving around in confusion without direction, both men and horses in chaos. It is Ajax who drives that confusion; I recognize the shield on his shoulders; it's as thick as a wall. Let's you and I get the hell over there with reinforcements of charioteers and infantry."

So the Trojan took hold of the reins, and set the horses going with a snap of the clear-voiced whip. The chariot lurched forward,

and gathered speed as it rolled joltingly over the bodies
of the dead men and their shields, Trojan and Argive dead; and blood
stained the axle beneath their feet; and the horses' raging hooves
flung back blood drops over the gold breast of the chariot box;
and the tires splashed through the puddles of blood. δῖος Hector
was eager to enter the fray, to break down whole lines of men;
and so he did, and his spear was given little rest from death.
He rampaged through the commotion of Achaean warriors,
warding off spears and swords and daggers and even flung boulders;
but one man alone he avoided, for he bided his time,
waiting for the one right moment : this man he shunned was Ajax.

Now Zeus Orderer, high at the helm that steers it all, thought it
amusing to urge Ajax to flee in terror from his foe.
So, down below, Ajax stood in amazement as panic flight
flooded his mind, a surprise so strange and unexpected that
it confused him. He flung his shield, seven layers of bulls'-hides
and thick as a wall, over his shoulder, tightened its buckle,
and, glancing curiously around him at the turbulent
combat, step by step slowly he retreated. Each backward step
he could hardly believe he was making, and every backward
step he resisted; yet, still and all, Ajax was retreating,
invincible Ajax! No, he couldn't hardly believe it,
but it was true, it was happening, he was subdued by fear,
he would never have believed it; and still he resisted, step
by step, as he withdrew further from the worst of the fighting,
his wondrous face, the very picture of incredulity.

Just as a hungry lion leaps a fence
into a herd of cattle, and would seize
the fattest and gorge on it, but is driven

back by dogs and hands, who refuse the lion
to take his prize; but he, lusting after
flesh, comes forward, but achieves nothing, for
the stones fly sharp and sundry through the air
from the bold hands of the men, who wave fire
brands at him, too, from which he recoils,
however eager; and at dawn he goes
away, defeated, and troubled in spirit.
Just so was Ajax troubled in spirit
to see the enemy vulnerable
to deep destruction before him; yet he
withdrew, and with the greatest reluctance—
for he hoped to protect the Argive ships,
and retreating was no way to do this.
But what man knows of the wry mind of Zeus?

Or, as when an ass, passing a cornfield,
outclasses the competence of children—
a lazy ass whose ribs have taken many
a hit from many a cudgel. So he
goes in and munches on the bristling grain,
and the boys beat him with sticks and stones, but
their strength is weak, and is hardly noticed
by the ass, who eats his fill, then moves on
and away, the lazy ass, on his own time.

Just so were the vigorous Trojans, with their allies, striking
furious Ajax with spears and stones and arrows, all of which
merely bounced off the front of his colossal shield. And Ajax
all the while wrestled with the strange visitation of Fate
within him. Now he stood ready to rush up and beat back the lines

of the advancing enemy, then would quickly change his mind and spin back round and start to flee, as a coward would flee.

Thus was the spectacle of Ajax's stuttering movements as he sought to overcome Zeus' will working inside him.

But triumphantly Ajax won hold of himself; and stormed up to the Trojans and Argives battling at the front, and held the enemy back from advancing on the precious ships.

And many spears from many a confident hand came sailing in at him only to stick fast in his massive wall-sized shield; while many others flying in never even touched his body, but fixed themselves uselessly in the dirt all round him, having failed in their greed to glut themselves on his excellent flesh.

Then Eurypylus, a brilliant warrior, Euaemon's son, saw Ajax caught in the shower of spears and stones and arrows; so he rushed to his side, took aim with his spear, and let fly. The spear pierced the liver of Apisaon, the soon-to-be-dead son of Phausius. Once a leader of men, now he was weak : his legs gave way and he dropped to the dirt. Eurypylus sprang onto his body to take his armour : but Alexandros saw, and strung an arrow on his sneaky bow, and drew the string back and struck Eurypylus in his right thigh. In towering rage Eurypylus tore at the arrow, but succeeded only in snapping the shaft in two; so the barbs stuck fast in his thigh and pain blazed up from the wound. Thus he fled from the battlefield and vanished into his turbulent army, thereby escaping the eyes of the goddesses of death flitting about the plain.

And he screamed at all the Argives round him, saying :

"Are you goddamn warriors? Face the enemy,

or this awful day ends in death for all of us!
 See how Ajax stands in those spears and arrows!
 How the hell is he supposed to survive that?
 Get over there and stand by Ajax! Go destroy
 the fucking Trojans!”

But Eurypylus swooned in pain before finishing his words,
 and his friends caught his bloody body from collapsing to earth.
 Then, raising both shields and spears, they crouched on one knee around him,
 to protect him.

And from out of the tumult of combat came long-faced Ajax,
 who came to stand by these men. He took a breath, and watched the fight;
 and Ajax thought about things.

And so the clash of men blazed like wildfire across the plain;
 and all the once-tight formations here and there were collapsing;
 and something terrible was being brought to birth.

Now δῖος Achilles was standing by the stern of his ship,
 watching the wretched tumult, watching the Achaeans getting
 destroyed. Then he saw Nestor’s horses, dripping in sweat, carry
 their master out of combat; and next to him stood Machaon.
 So Achilles called out to his friend Patroclus, who heard him,
 and stepped out of their tent. When Achilles saw ἄρης - loving
 Patroclus appear, he sighed, and knew it was time for a change.
 He knew something terrible was about to come to birth.

And he heard Patroclus ask him :

“Why do you call me, Achilles? What would you like?”

And Achilles answered him :

“Patroclus, the only friend I can trust in this goddamn world, expect the Achaean men to come here to drop to their knees before me in prayer. It should be soon; I think they know now that what they need can no longer be ignored. While we wait for them to grovel, go to Nestor and learn whom he brought from the field with him. I only saw the injured man from behind, and Nestor’s horses move remarkably fast for a man who moves slow, but the man I saw may have been Machaon. Find out.”

So Patroclus heard and obeyed his friend, and ran off alongside the long line of tents and ships of the Achaeans, while the dust from the battle came sifting down out of the sky onto things.

Meanwhile, when heroes Nestor and Machaon arrived at Nestor’s tent, they stepped down from the chariot onto the silent earth; and Eurymedon, the old man’s attendant, freed the horses’ necks of the yoke. During this, the two men stood in the sea-breeze on the beach and cooled themselves, and dried the sweat off their tunics. Then they turned from the uneasy waves and went inside the tent. Nestor offered Machaon the most comfortable couch, then he sat himself down in a chair. The two of them sighed and took in the blessed quiet; though the combat-noise, however muted from this distance, was inescapable. Hecamede, one of Nestor’s handmaids, saw the travail in their faces and bodies, and mixed for them a drink, a potion of many ingredients, including honey, wine, and also stimulating *pharmakon*. This fair-haired maid was a prize that the Achaeans had chosen for him when Achilles sacked Island Tenedos. The daughter of great-

hearted Arsinous, she had been far the best of the prizes,
 for in counsel Nestor was known as best among men. So she
 set a table before them, an elaborate beauty with legs
 of blue enamel, and shining bright with polish, and set there
 a wicker basket of bread, and also an onion to add
 spice to the drink. And in the middle of the table she put
 a very beautiful cup with base of gold; and golden studs
 ornamented the huge cup all over, which when full was too
 heavy for the old man to lift these days, though in times past, back
 at home, he had been seen to raise it easily. Four handles
 allowed the cup to be lifted, and each was carved in shape
 of twin doves with beaks touching. Such was this colossal drinking
 cup of ancient times. And now the handmaiden Hecamede,
 lovely as a goddess, added to it some Pramnian wine,
 a black-coloured drink, and grated into it some goat's cheese, then
 sprinkled white barley meal over all as a sacred final touch.
 Then she smiled a beautiful smile as an invitation
 to drink. So the two men drew from the potion and quenched their thirst,
 soothing their parched throats, and as they drank they spoke of heroic
 deeds of long ago. δῖος Patroclus, meanwhile, stood silent
 in the doorway; and when the old man saw, he rose from his seat
 and led the young man in by his hand, and offered him a chair.

But Patroclus pulled his hand away and returned to the door,
 saying :

"Surely I have no time to sit, old sir, beloved of Zeus
 though you be; and you, sir, will not persuade me. He-who-is-feared-
 as-the-gods-is-feared has sent me here to learn of the man who
 was led out of combat with you. But I see the wounded man,
 the most excellent Machaon, leader of men. So now I

must go to bring word to Achilles, most powerful of all.”

And Nestor, horseman of Gerenia, answered him :

“Now why in the world would Achilles lament the pain of one man yet ignore the many fallen? The entire army is collapsing under spear and arrow and stone and sword; and grief runs through the ships by the sea as our best men are injured by spear and sword thrusts, yet Achilles notices nothing of *that*? Diomedes is wounded, Odysseus is wounded, and Agamemnon; and Eurypylus has an arrow sticking out his thigh; and the men carried off the field are beyond number, and keeps growing, as Trojan arrows keep flying off the strings. But then there’s Achilles, δῖος Achilles, valiant Achilles—who cares nothing for the Argives, and is unable to feel pity. Is he waiting to see our ships burn to ash, though we fight hard to stop it? Is he waiting to see every last man slaughtered? I can’t fight like him; I’m not what I was; my mind still moves fast but not my hands and feet. If only I had the strength of youth! The strength I had when my people fought the Eleans over more than a little bit of cattle-lifting on my part. In reply to their anger I cut down good Itymoneus, son of Hypeirochus, a man well-known in Elis, the city where he lived, the city where I had to beat back many a man defending their wealth. While fighting for his cattle, he stood at the front and got a spear from my hands for his effort; and when he fell dead all the country people scattered in all directions in terror of their lives. In terror of me. The booty we divided up was massive in number : we drove fifty herds of cattle from the plain, fifty flocks of sheep; as many swine, as many goats; and a hundred and

fifty beautiful horses, every one a mare, and most with foals at the teat. All this we drove into Pylos by night, and king Neleus, my father, was pleased to see his young son leading such a bounty into the citadel.”

And Patroclus was about to speak, but Nestor continued :

“It took us three days to divide it all up among the people; and on the third day we sacrificed to the gods, and on the same day the Epians who live in Elis came after their wealth, and their revenge. And with them came the two Moliones, a strange pair of warriors joined as one and who lived and moved as one; and all those arms and legs could take a person down fast. That was why, by the way, they were famous throughout the wide world as ‘the Crusher’, though they were two, and not one; which I saw with my eyes. We were all young then. The place was Thryoessa, now called Thryon, a city on a high hill at the lowest point of the border of Pylos, along the river Alpheius. To reach the city you had to cross a plain, and they came in full battle array, many warriors and many horses, and surrounded the city upon a hill. Now we were far away and knew nothing of this, but goddess Athena came down from Olympus to advise us to arm for war. So we gathered together in full arms and armour, eager to fight. But old Neleus, considering my young age, refused my participation in the battle, and hid my horses from me, because he expected that someone so young must know so little about face-to-face combat. But as it happened I was a hero that day to outdo even our horsemen, though I was on foot; this was the outcome that Athena wished.”

And Patroclus was about to speak, but Nestor continued :

“Down there is Minyeïus, a river that empties into the sea by lovely Arene. There by the waters we waited for Dawn to show herself, our entire army of chariots and infantry, and by the time the sun was at its highest we came to sacred Alpheius, and we saw the enemy gathered round the lofty city, eager to tear it down. We made prayer to Athena and then we joined in battle. I was first to kill my man, and take his horses for myself—the warrior Mulius, son-in-law of the king of the Epeians, Augeias, whose eldest daughter some now call Medea. She was fair-haired, and knew about all the herbs and drugs that grow out of the wide earth. Mulius, though, would soon know nothing more, not after he felt my bronze spear sink into him, and the dust rushed up to take him away. I took his chariot and stood at the front with the best of the fighters. But the Epeians, one by one, began to flee from us, as one by one they saw Mulius dead on the earth. So it turned out that Mulius had been leader of their charioteers, and celebrated in battle. But I leapt on them like a thunderstorm of hard rain and took fifty chariots and their war-horses with them. And with each chariot I took, two warriors fell dead to earth, eliminated by the point of my spear. But Zeus Wide-Ruler preserved the Epeians from total ruin, and as night fell he let them flee into the dark, however many survivors there were. Then Athena turned us round for home, but not till I was the one to kill the last man, and leave him there to rot. And so it happened the Achaeans celebrated the name of Nestor, killer of the Moliones, twin sons of King Actor, though some say—and maybe truly—they were sons

of god Poseidon. That's what was I was once, young man. Achilles, now, *he* would keep his power to himself, for his own pleasure. I say one day he will weep when he sees the army destroyed. I was there when your father the war-minded Menoetius sent you from Phthia to Agamemnon, I and Odysseus both. We heard all as it echoed through the magnificent halls of the house of Peleus; for we were there assembling the warriors from the monumental land of Achaia. It was there we met with your father Menoetius and you. Old man Peleus, you'll remember, was burning the savoury thigh-slices of a bull to Zeus Father, who delights in thunder. We were standing in the walled courtyard. Then Peleus lifted a golden cup and poured out the flame-red wine on the ground. You and your father were standing together, having the honour of preparing the meat; and I and Odysseus stood by the doorway of the palace. And when Achilles saw us, he leaped up with amazement, and took our hands, and led us in, and invited us to sit; and he placed before us all that is right."

Then Patroclus was about to speak, but Nestor continued :

"When we'd had our pleasure in food and drink, I was first to speak, and urged you, Patroclus and Achilles, to follow us; and you were together eager to come, and on you two your fathers laid heavy commands. Old man Peleus encouraged his son to be the best and bravest, distinguished above all others; and to you, too, your father gave command : 'My son, in birth is Achilles the superior, for his mother is of celestial blood; and though he is far stronger than you, you are the older man. So speak to him wisely. Point out the right way. Convince him of the good, and he will enjoy the benefit of your thought.'

This your father said to you, but you fail to remember it.
 Now at this critical moment speak out to wise and warlike
 Achilles, if he will hear you. Who can say that God himself
 will not join with your words to win over his mighty spirit?
 Encouragement from a friend is indeed the sound of a god."

Thus spoke Nestor, and roused the rage in the spirit of the youth,
 who left immediately and ran down the line of black ships
 toward the son of Aeacus, Achilles. At Odysseus' ship,
 there at the central point, the army's place of assembly,
 where massive decisions were made, and where the army's altars
 were prepared when sacrifice was due, there Patroclus along
 the way met with powerful Eurypylus, who had half an
 arrow stuck in his thigh; he had limped his way out of combat.
 Sweat and blood flowed down his head and shoulders, and his wound gushed
 dark blood down his leg, but he didn't look bothered, though the wound
 irritated him. When the young man saw him, the son of wise
 Menoetius, he took in the weight of the situation
 for the first time, and blurted out words, saying :

"What is this terrible sight? All our leaders and kings falling?
 No! This cannot be our destiny! We die here? Far from all
 we know, our friends and homeland, swallowed up to glut the bellies
 of the dogs of Troy? Come now! Hero Eurypylus, beloved
 of Zeus, will the Achaeans hold back Hector, or are we dead?"

And the wounded Eurypylus answered him :

"Seems over to me, sorry to say, excellent Patroclus.
 We have no defence. Soon our men will come running to their ships.
 Once upon a time they were the bravest and the best, now they're

about to lie dead or dying with wounds from spears and arrows
and swords and all else, sent from Trojan hands. Their strength keeps growing.

But come now! Try to keep me alive. Carry me to my ship
and I'll tell you what to do as we do it."

And good Patroclus asked along the way :

"What will I do?"

And the wounded Eurypylus answered him :

"Cut out this goddamn complicated arrowhead from my thigh,
to begin with. No use taking me to our own surgeons' huts;
I hear Machaon requires his own surgeon around here
somewhere, while Podaleirius is still out on the plain;
that excellent man fights on, while I need him by the huts."

And good Patroclus asked him :

"But how can this be happening? Hero Eurypylus, what
do I do? I carry a message from Nestor to deliver
to Achilles. I was on my way to him when I met you.
No—I can't leave you like this now."

Thus spoke Patroclus. So they came to Eurypylus' hut,
and went inside; and immediately his attendant spread
ox-hides onto the ground. So Eurypylus stretched himself out,
then spoke to the others, saying :

"Bring that dagger. Now cut it out. It's barbed in a tricky way;

you may have to root around.”

So Patroclus extracted the deep-fixed arrowhead; then washed the wound with warm water. Next, he was instructed to take herbs and crush them between the palms of his hands; then placed his hands hard on the wound. Thus, all pains ended, and the wound stopped leaking blood.

End of Book XI

Book XII

Good Patroclus cared for the wounded warrior Eurypylus,
 while out on the battlefield the Argives and Trojans fought
 on as one combined mass, disorderly and indiscriminate,
 innumerable men intermixed over the vast Scamander plain.
 And the trench that the Argives had dug, and the wall they had raised,
 made in haste to protect their ships, and preserve all that was theirs,
 as a precaution would serve no purpose against the swarming
 Trojans bringing abundance of death to the Argives. And yet,
 for so long as Hector lived, and so long as Achilles raged,
 and the city of King Priam stood, lofty and shining, unfallen,
 for all that time the Wall of the Achaeans stood likewise tall
 and mighty-looking. But when all the best and bravest of Troy
 had died, and when all those Achaeans still standing on their feet
 (many had been killed but some were left) and King Priam's city
 was finally obliterated in the tenth year of the war,
 and the Argives had sailed back to their beloved homeland,
 then Poseidon and Apollo destroyed that Wall down to nothing.
 All the rivers that stream down from high Ida's ridges—Rhesus
 τε Heptaporus τε Caresus τε Rhodius τε Granicus τε Aesepus,
 τε δῖος Scamander καὶ Simois—on all of whose banks
 had collected old shields of ox-hide, and helmets, and the dust
 of warriors who had fought like immortals but died as men—
 all these rivers Apollo diverted together as one
 mammoth rush of water, and sent it smashing continuously
 into the wall for a day, and Zeus dropped rain into the torrent
 to swell its power and hasten the collapse of the great Wall
 into the sea. And Poseidon Earthshaker, trident in hand,
 led the way, sending waves up the shore and obliterating
 all foundations of timber and stone raised by the Achaeans

with great effort, and pulled it all into the sea. He then made level again the entire strait of the strong Hellespont, and redirected the rivers back, each to its separate way, its sacred place where its beautiful waters had always flowed. All this, men say, because the Argives failed to sacrifice properly to the gods, once upon a time.

Thus was the destiny of Apollo and Poseidon to be. Just now, though, war and battle-cries blazed round the well-built Wall; and all along its heights the strong and sizable Wall rattled as the spears and stones clattered against it; and the Argives saw themselves pushed back to their precious ships, squeezed in tight between Wall and sea, in awe of Hector, author of mighty destruction and panic flight, who raged through the battle like a whirlwind of Zeus, closing in on them jostling there with spear and shield all along the lines of tents and ships, and behind them the waves of the sea. As when a lion or wild boar wheels round on his pursuers, the dogs and hunters, his heart beating high in its strength; but they, a crowd of men, stand side by side close together, and hurl spears from their quick-moving fingers in a shower of death against him; yet his high heart feels no fear, nor urge to flee, though courage brings threat; and he wheels first this way, then that way, measuring the strength of the lines of men, and wherever he charges, the lines open up : just so, Hector smashed through enemy lines, calling back to his men to follow him up to the trench and across it. But as he neared it, his quick-galloping horses halted with a jolt; they dare not make the leap. So they neighed loudly and restlessly at the edge of the deep, and jumped about, and ground their teeth, and saw the wide space yawning from edge to edge, and its dark depths : no easy leap to make, for the sons of the Achaeans had erected a palisade of sharp-tipped stakes along the rim

of the far side of the trench : numerous, ordered close, and fearsome to enemies attempting a leap. Indeed, no easy feat it would be for horses drawing chariots to reach that far ground. But his foot-soldiers came up, eager to get down inside it and across, come what may. And daring Polydamas came up close beside Hector thinking on his chariot, and spoke :

“Hector, forget it! Their ditch is too dangerous to cross; our horses are smart enough to see it! Look at the stakes down there! And if we gather strength and get through, that Wall will trap our men at the front and crush them as the rest rush through and assemble behind; there’s not enough room over there. Anyway, why the hell would we want to take a chariot down there? You want to fight in such a narrow space? I think we will suffer if we fuck with this ditch. That thunder we heard earlier? Maybe it was for us. I want those unknowns dead as much as you do, but if we get tangled up down there, no one of us will be left even to bring the bad news to the city. Hector, what do you think?”

And Hector answered him :

“Okay. I’m not going to argue with you or my horses. Come now! All Trojan leaders and allies! Have all men dismount the chariots (and have the attendants restrain the horses). We’re moving forward on foot, fully armed and armoured. Follow me. This is our chance! If they fall here, they’re ruined forever!”

So spoke Hector, and all were impressed with his words.

Hector then jumped from his board down to earth, and his armour rattled round him. And all the other Trojans jumped from their boards

onto the dirt, once they saw δῖος Hector on foot. So each man ordered his driver to curb the horses there by the trench; and the Trojan foot-forces formed five divisions of warriors, each commanded by a leader of men.

The first company quickly gathered : for all men were eager to go with Hector and the excellent Polydamas, knowing those two had the best chance to smash through the wall, and fight through to the ships; so Hector soon had many eager men gathered round him, including, by Hector's choice, his own driver Cebriones. (So Hector left behind for his horses a man much weaker than his charioteer.) Paris and Alcathous led the second company with Agenor; and Helenus and powerful Deïphobus, both sons of Priam, led the third company, and the third man with them was Asius, canny warrior : Asius, Hyrtacus' son, who had come from Arisbe on a sleek and shining horse reared by the river Selleïs. And the leader of the fourth company was the courageous son of Anchises, Aeneas; and beside him were two sons of Antenor, Archelochus and Acamas, who knew all there was about all manner of fighting. And Sarpedon led the allies, and chose Glaucus and war-hungry Asteropaeus as seconds, for they were much distinguished in battle, and he himself was the best fighter even among all these heroes.

So the companies of men closed ranks. They stood in tight lines with shields touching end to end, and advanced on the Achaeans in straight lines, breathing fury, having no thought of restraint, but only to fall on the precious black ships.

So the Trojan warriors advanced on the trench,

and the Wall behind it (if they survived the crossing down below); but, at it happened, the Achaean forces, having shot the bolt of the gate of their Wall and opened it wide, decided it better to concentrate all defence where they stood, to prevent their ships becoming bonfires along the beach. Let them fall here, and be ruined forever; or harry the Trojans back within the safety of *their* walls.

So the Trojans began flooding over the trench.

The scene recalled the ancient and obscure story of the fox from Teumessus, a place somewhere along the highway of sorts from Thebes to Chalcis. Frenzied, noisy Dionysus, god of Mysteries and Madness reared a gigantic blood-thirsty fox, then set it on the children of Thebes, in retaliation for an insult no one knew anything about. The Teumessian fox had eaten many a child by the time Artemis put Zeus' dog on him, Laelaps, the shining hound that caught everything it chased. But twice-born Dionysus raised the fox as a trickster creature never to be caught. So there it was : the hunting dog who always caught its prey now chased the fox who would never be caught. Zeus flung both into the heavens where they glimmer now as constellations pursuing each other through the night, what people call the two dogs. So this was Zeus' present decree : a balance of power. One side or the other might wear the laurel crown of victory.

But some men would fall from their own idiocy.
While all other Trojans and their illustrious allies
now followed Hector's command, Asius alone,
Hyrtaeus' son, disobeyed; for he was not
willing to leave his horses behind. So he formed
a plan of his own, and with his attendant devised
a causeway over the trench simply by binding
beams of timber together, while the army
marched on among him and beyond. But this bridge built
by Asius brought him straight to his death. Yet Fate
would draw out his life until he came to the lines
of his friends facing the open gate of Victory.
Just when he thinks of the honour he will exult
in, when returning victorious to the city
of Troy across the plain, just then the hateful Fates
will embrace him, and drag him down unhappily
into darkness : for now a spear sent from the hand
of noble Idomeneus is destined to pass
through his body, and there is no way around this.
(How Ajax beat Destiny is a secret Zeus alone knows.)

He will never return across the windy plain
to Troy, exulting in victory on his horses
and chariot, not while the son of Deucalion lives.

But for now Asius was driving his horses
along the left end of the infantry, along
a path the Argives always followed when coming
back with horses and chariots from the plain.
Following this dirt track, his horses curved in toward

the open gate; and when Asius saw their shelter
 free to enter, he shouted to his men, to rouse them,
 a cry of no surrender; and all his men roared
 in answer, war-cries frothing at their mouths, for they
 believed the Achaeans were about to collapse,
 and the invaders would fall on their perishable
 ships; and that would be that. But these men did not know
 that two of the best men, war-loving sons of the
 fierce Lapiths, stood now by the gate, ready to face
 all comers : one, much-killing Polypoetes,
 a man whose strong hands delight in allotting death,
 son of mighty Peirithous; and the other,
 man-destroying, Ἄρκος - loving Leonteus.
 These two stood tall before the open gate like two
 lofty oaks on mountain peaks, that stand fixed in place
 with tendrilous roots clutching the earth with immovable grip,
 and hold fast through all the days of wind and rain : just so
 these two warriors waited patiently for King Asius
 to reach them. So while some of the Trojan army stormed up
 to the Wall to scale it, Asius led his shield-bearing
 warriors straight for the gate, as did the leaders
 Iamenus and Orestes; and Adamas, son of Asius;
 and Thoön, and Oenomaus. All these screamed a bestial
 outcry of victory, and held their own solidly-built shields
 in front of them, and made for the gate to the Argive army,
 (now more-than-motivated to protect their lives and their ships).
 Some of the Argive spearmen and charioteers advanced on
 the Trojans attempting to overmaster the Wall; and came
 on like an animal thrashing through the twigs and branches of
 a forest, ripping up roots and causing noisy uproar along
 the way : just so the Argive warriors crashed wildly through

the Trojan onslaught at the Wall, falling upon them like brilliant tusks stabbing out and taking their lives, while the bronze clashed in hand-to-hand combat, where men stake their lives on their strength.

And death from above came down as a shower of stones began to spray out from all along the rim of the wall, where soldiers were poised, throwing what were no small stones either, but even rolling boulders off the edge, to save their lives, not just from death, but a worst death, a slaughterous end, of dying in pieces. So the Argives hurled many a stone from their sturdy wall's height, defending themselves and their tents and their ships, and each other; and the stones sprinkled down through the air like snowflakes pummelling the dark face of the all-nourishing earth : the immense air gushed with stone, as when rushing black clouds drop showers crackling on surfaces; even so the helmets and shields of the invaders, all that bronze gear, echoed with the drumming reverberations of rocks sprinkling down and collecting on the darkened earth. And over the shimmering noise of this battering, Asius, Hyrtacus' son, cried out into the sky that sheltered Troy :

"Zeus, you're a liar if you allow this to be!
Who would have expected them to stop up our way
so wholly? Stop our power? and our man-breaking hands?
These bastards are like bees or wasps who refuse to
quit their nest by a wayside; but spill out like poison
and attack men, who run away; and so protect
their brood. These two Argives refuse to let us through!
They're minded to cut us down till they fall down dead."

So spoke Asius, but Zeus paid no attention to his voice;
for it was to Hector instead that Zeus preferred to give glory.

So the warriors fought in close combat in two places :
 at the gate, facing the two Argive heroes, and along the Wall.
 Difficult it is for me to describe all this thoroughly;
 to do so one would have to be as a god.

At the foot of the Wall, along its length, the Trojans lit fires
 to chase off the stone-throwers above; and the Achaeans, still
 with their ruin in the balance, pushed back with all of their force
 against unyielding Asius and his men at the gate.

Then the war-hungry Lapiths leapt into the fray by the gate,
 beside powerful Polypoetes, Perithous's son,
 whose spear crossed the air and hit Damasus full in the helmet,
 and his face didn't slow down the spear-tip, which shattered his skull
 and his brains ran out : so the raging Polypoetes broke
 him forever, then whirled round and killed Pylon with his bare hands,
 and Ormenus, too. Ἄρης - loving Leonteus, meanwhile,
 watched his lethal spear run through the belly of Hippomachus,
 son of Antimachus; then drew his sword and pushed through warriors
 struggling in battle, and with a percussive strike that rang out
 louder than a stone he brought Antiphates to the surface
 of the earth, and his dead spirit sank below. Then he brought
 Menon, and Iamenus, and Orestes, each to his end,
 lying broken on the earth among all the other limp dead.

And the battle had a third area, as it happened : the edges
 of the trench. Now the youths daring enough to follow Hector
 and Polydamas was a tremendous number, including
 all the best and bravest of Trojans; but when the offensive
 pressed on, some of these youths, not so brave, lingered at the hindmost,

and were now doing only what they had seen much worthier warriors doing : stripping the dead of its armour. So while their fellow warriors were striving eagerly to scale the Wall, and push through the gate, to get to the ships, and set them aflame, these youths left the corpses where they lay, and looked into the sky to watch a bird of omen flying over their heads, a high-reaching eagle freed of all bounds, and it seemed shining. But when the long-soaring eagle reached the left end of the sky, they saw it held a snake in its talons, struggling and thrashing; in colour, a deep-red; and as the youths below wondered at this, the snake lashed out at the eagle's breast and neck, attempting to sink its venom into the beast, but the eagle simply made a move, and pieces of the snake sprinkled down onto the heads of the youths below. Then, with a shriek, the eagle veered off and away into broad, deep sky. The youths on the ground shuddered, and looked about them, and at each other, in icy silence, for they all understood that the snake was them, and the eagle—the continuing, enduring, endless power of the gods. So then the heroic Trojan youths lost all desire to strip the fallen of their armour, there by the trench.

Meanwhile, the two fronts of the Trojan onslaught had broken down : its finely-ordered divisions had confusedly merged into one cascading mob overwhelming the Argive Wall all the way to the wide-open gate of the enemy camp, its ships vulnerable to attack and destruction. Hector, hacking through the Achaeans with death-delighting hand, was seen by Polydamas, who came near to him, and spoke out, saying :

“I’m just a soldier, Hector, but you like my words when you hear them, even if they often challenge

your own. I think it my duty to inform you
 I fear us pressing on to the ships. We should cease
 now and retreat, till we understand things better.
 You and I both saw that eagle of Zeus fly up
 to heaven. That snake in its grip was alive, till
 it wasn't. If I read that right, we're to think its
 young ones in the nest will go hungry—the eagle
 cut the food to pieces and dropped it on us.
 Does that sound auspicious to you? I think even
 if we get to their ships we shall not enjoy it.
 Should we withdraw for now? till one of our seers,
 having better skill to interpret these sky-signs,
 calls my words certain, or foolish? Do we retreat,
 convinced by the word of Zeus? Or do we go on?"

So Hector turned roughly to Polydamas, his helmet bronze
 flashing fire, and with darkened brow he answered him, saying :

"Polydamas, your words do more than challenge me; right now they
 tell me to kill you. Read into a flying bird any way
 you want! If Zeus would speak, let him do it clearly! Otherwise,
 give up your speculation in an eagle flying left or right!
 We have been given great strength by Olympus, that much I know;
 or why would the gods allow us to reach this triumphant point?
 You say that Zeus would bring us this far only to destroy us?
 I don't believe it. If you quit the field, or persuade others
 with your evil words to quit, I will kill you with my bare hands."

So spoke Hector, who led the fighting at the Wall,
 shouting commands to his men while pushing through
 the crowd, cutting down Argives in his way; and Zeus

of the Abyss, who from Mount Ida's peak lets loose
the winds that blow all things forward, just now was not
even watching as the Trojans attacked the Wall,
attempting with iron hand-tools and with levers
to pry the stones loose to make it all tumble down;
but flesh-tearing Argive warriors kept flooding
onto the enemy in heavy waves; and for
every stone that was wrenched from the wall, some bunched-up
ox-hide was slipped into the crack, and the Argives
kept their lofty fortification upright for now.

And the two Ajaxes also stomped alongside
the wall, thundering this way and that, back and forth,
continually encouraging the Argives,
some with a joke, while screaming angrily at others,
calling them slackers; and exhorting everyone
to push the Trojans off the Wall, and shove them back
into the trench, where they could be carved up nicely.

So as they went on, here and there they spoke, saying :

"Argives! Friends! Whoever we are in life, we're all
equal now, and in it together! So fight for
the man next to you, who fights for you! Do it now!
You know what we face! Anything less than your best
and we die! Go on! Each urge the next to kill them
all! Kill them all and Zeus Lightning may give us back
all our strength; then we'll push them back to the city!"

So the pair shouted as they went along, and roused
the warriors to greater killing effort. So both sides fought

according to Zeus' present decree : a balance of power.

One side or the other might wear the laurel crown of victory.

Just as when snowflakes fall thick and numerous on a winter's day, when God is minded to rouse the snow to fall down upon the earth, thereby revealing to us those gentle darts of his; and he lulls the air into a sleep, and the flakes fall straight down continuously until the mountain summits and the reaching headlands and the grassy plains and the well-ordered, deep-soiled fields of men and the harbours and beaches of the ancient sea are all covered in snow (though the wave reaches up and scours it away from the sand) : but all else is covered in whiteness like one continuous blanket that fluttered down from above to fall heavily on the earth, covering the fertile soil, and indiscriminate all along its uniform way : just so was the air by the Wall awash in showers of spears and stones and arrows and all else, in equal numbers falling upon Trojan and Argive alike, as the men flung them back and forth, indiscriminate just now to the Olympians and left to themselves, to their shouts resounding along the Wall.

And when Achaean warriors began flying through the air, smashing against the Wall and breaking every bone doing so, then the Trojans knew Sarpedon was roused to his angriest. He threw men the way others throw stones. So the Argives spread out around him but he charged them as a lion leaps into cattle. The shield he held before him had been hammered into perfect balance by a skilled bronzesmith, a perfect circle, and its thick layers of dry ox-hide were stitched together with golden wire that ran continuously round the entirety of the disc. Suddenly he had two long spears in his hands, and he went to the Argives as a lion, mountain-raised and rugged, too long

in need of food, gets into a craftily-built enclosure
 of sheep; and though he find there herdsmen and dogs guarding the sheep,
 his indomitable spirit will not retreat until he's made
 an attempt on the flocks. He knows he will either carry off
 a dead thing with him, or be killed by a spear that a skilled hand
 had aimed. Just so it was do or die as Sarpedon saw it.

So he cried out to friend Glaucus, saying :

"Follow me, Glaucus, and advance into a glorious death :
 either our own, or another's at our victorious hands!"

And Glaucus responded :

"Keep killing, Sarpedon, and you'll keep earning your honoured seat
 at the feasts, and your cup will stay full! Then you can get back to
 your palace in Lycia by the banks of swirling Xanthus!"

And Sarpedon responded :

"Your house is no smaller than mine—so ensure you feed death well!"

Thus the two warriors spoke, laughed, raised their weapons,
 and carved through the havoc among the company of Lycians.
 The black smoke breathed by the various fires along the base
 of the wall obscured the air, and the fast-moving back-and-forth
 of spears and arrows and stones, and the jostling of men
 wrestling in death-struggles, some with daggers, some with bare hands
 pushing men face-first into the dirt : but, through all the tumult,
 Menestheus, Peteos' son, saw Sarpedon and Glaucus
 stalk among their people, and he shuddered in terror to see

their death-bringing hands that promised misery; so, bumping in to men all round him he looked every which way in a panic for any Achaean leader to come and defend this part of the Wall and help save himself and his fellow warriors. Through the fiery smoke he saw the two Ajaxes killing fine warriors, and he saw Teucer as well, having just stepped into this part of the field. So panicky Menestheus let out a cry, a far-reaching call, for these leaders to come, but his cry went unheard amid the deafening battle-sounds; and he foresaw Sarpedon and Glaucus storming right over him to bring death in through the open gates of the Argive camp. Terrifying was the fact that he was wounded in the leg, so was unable to flee from their oncoming menace : so he grabbed a man named Thoötes and spoke in agitation :

“Go, Thoötes, run quick and bring Ajax! Either one will do; but both would be better! Tell them ruin comes for us, even the mightiest Lycians, though we’ve been fighting like mad dogs! Let Ajax, Telamon’s son, come alone, if need be. Maybe Teucer will come with him, and demonstrate his skill with the bow? Go, Thoötes, run quick!”

So spoke panicky Menestheus, and Thoötes ran off through the chaos until he reached the two Ajaxes. He then delivered the wounded man’s message, as he was asked to do.

Mighty Telamonian Ajax heard the call, then spoke out to Ajax the smaller, Oïleus’ son, saying :

“Stay here with good Lycomedes. Keep everyone fighting hard.
I’m going over there to stomp on some Trojans. When some Lycians
lie dead I’ll be back.”

Thus Telamonian Ajax, who went off without waiting
for an answer, kicking corpses out of his way. With him went
Teucer, his brother from the same father; and Pandion came
too, the man entrusted with holding Teucer’s ultraprecise
bow. So the three of them pushed through the earth-quaking battle,
through the shower of spears and arrows and the fiery smoke.
They used the black smoke rising from the base of the Wall as cover
for their advance; so quickly reached the wounded Menestheus
and their people, who just now were overwhelmed by the Trojan
warriors striving eagerly for the Wall, advancing like
a storm coming furiously down over the Achaeans;
but Ajax came out of the black smoke, as colossal in size
as any man who had ever lived; and the two sides faced off
with a shrieking war-cry.

The wounded Menestheus watched Ajax lift a massive stone,
one that the Trojans had wrenched from the Wall; so heavy a stone
that no man ever since has lifted such a weight with two hands
only : and he dropped it on Sarpedon’s good friend Epicles,
who saw it come down from on high as a mountain might collapse,
and the bones of his head were crushed flat; and his spirit flitted
away. His four-horned helmet had been of no use there. Teucer,
meanwhile, struck Glaucus, strong son of Hippolochus, after
he scurried up a Trojan’s ladder and let off an arrow
from the top of the Wall, when he saw Glaucus’ arm appear
from under his shield for an instant; thus Glaucus was taken
out of the fight. He withdrew quickly, so that no Achaean

might see him wounded, and exult over it with scathing words.

And Sarpedon saw Glaucus go, and grieved, yet fought on, and thrust his spear through the heart of Alcmaon, Thestor's son; then drew the spear back and turned away before the body fell to earth, the exquisitely carved bronze armour rattling round it.

Then Sarpedon flung his spear aside and reached out with both hands and fixed his fingers firmly on a heavy stone fitted in the Wall, and wrenched it out. Then he watched as many stones above it collapsed. And so Sarpedon had opened a way into the Argive camp for his army of warriors to pass through.

But Ajax and Teucer acted together against him. Teucer strung a lethal arrow and let fly while Ajax sprung at him, striking him full-body with a push of his man-sized shield. So Sarpedon staggered from Ajax's blow, yet stayed on his feet; and though Teucer's arrow hit its mark, it stuck fast in the shield strap, whose shining leather stopped the arrow-point cold; so Sarpedon survived the two-pronged attack; and stepped away into the swarm of Lycians, and out of sight. But Ajax and Teucer, through smoke and fire and struggling men, heard him scream out :

"You Lycians! Where are the 'godlike' Lycians?
Where are the 'equal-to-the-gods' Lycians? Show yourselves now and fight! For I can't do it alone!
I can lift their stones one by one, but our work here now needs more than two hands! Come, follow me and break a way open to their ships! The more hands, the better the work!"

Thus spoke Sarpedon, and the Lycians shuddered at his words

rebuking them, and shuddered at his retreat; and the Argives
 by this time were consolidating their forces by the Wall
 into a tightly-ordered battle formation, and pushed back
 against the Trojans and their allies; and hard work came to them,
 came to all, there by the edge of the Scamander plain. The breach
 in the Wall was inviting, but no man could yet slip past the
 band of Achaeans defending the way on the other side.
 Nor could the Achaeans push the enemy back from the Wall
 entirely, not now, now that they had come so close. So, like
 two men with allotments in a common field arguing over
 a boundary stone, using measuring-rods as their tool of choice,
 both quarrelling for an equal share of it, there in the narrow
 space; even so the two armies faced off, but here with convex
 shields butting one another head-on; and the unpredictable
 blazons (strips of leather fluttering around over the shield
 face, each with terrifying monsters sewn on, and always in
 motion) sought to catch the enemy's eye for a lethal moment.
 Indeed, many men died from thrusts of the cold bronze into their
 bodies, any time they left themselves unprotected even
 for a second. Or spears shot right through shields and killed their man.
 And all their side of the wall was spattered with the blood of man,
 both Trojan and Achaean, mixed. But the Trojans could not make
 the Achaeans withdraw in panic flight, but they held on, just
 as the twin balances of a scale, one with a standard
 weight, the other with puffs of wool, come to level out in the
 hand of an artisan woman, who then takes her meagre pay,
 —food, or some cloth—and wanders on : just so, the war drew on
 in level measure. Then, through furious death-cries and flying
 Argive body parts, Hector came forth from out of the tumult,
 and was seen by all; and was both cheered and dreaded. Man-killing
 δῖος Hector shouted to the Trojans around him, saying :

“Now, all Trojans, tear down the wall! Get to the ships with your fire and set them alight!”

Thus spoke Hector, and was heard by all who could hear him.

So the Trojans pushed to the far edge of their strength and struggled their way to the Wall; while Hector ran round to the gate of the camp, now shut, and Polypoetes and Leonteus were gone.

Hector took all the time he wished, to admire the craftsmanship before him : the two doors of the gate joined seamlessly together, and he pictured the iron crossbars well-fitted to the planks, one extending along the top, and one at the bottom, with perhaps a vertical bolt reinforcing the hold of the seam.

This was a gateway constructed by the most ingenious men.

So Hector seized a large stone that stood there by the gate, and lifted it up over his head for all to see : it was conical in shape, and wondrous smooth : and no two men, the best of a community, could have easily hauled up that stone from dirt to wagon, even with tools (such is the sort of men we are now), but all alone Hector raised it lightly into the sky, just as a shepherd holds in his hand the wisps of wool from his rams, and the weight is no burden : and he brought it opposite the two closed doors of the beautifully-made gate. And Hector planted himself firmly where he stood, and flung the stone forth, and it was no weak throw that shattered the doors off their iron hinges : and the stones at its sides tumbled down with a crashing sound, and continued to tumble, and shining Hector went inside, his face like night.

But his bronze shone round his body and was fearful to look on.

Spear-tips glimmered, one here, one there, outward from him.

No one who got in his way would restrain him, and his eyes blazed fire, to warn all men to stay back. And he wheeled round the crowd

of Argive warriors, who spread out round him in a circle,
and over his shoulder he called to the Trojans behind him :

“Do it now!”

he cried, and his army of warriors heard him, and many
crossed over the rubble of the Wall, and many more poured through
the well-made gate, and obeyed his command. Then the Danaans
put to flight and broke for the ships, as a terrible noise rose.

End of Book XII

Book XIII

Zeus, once he permitted Hector and the Trojan warriors to reach the precious Achaean ships, gave no more attention to all their continual toil and misery there, but turned his shining eyes aside to look even farther distant : to the land of the Thracians, where, just now, men were breaking horses; and to the Mysians, where, just now, boys were working at hand-to-hand combat practice; and to the Hippemolgi, the solid-hearted nomads who drank the milk of mares, and kept to themselves; and he looked to the Abii, they who abstained from all war—the most decent of men. Zeus Father no longer lowered his eyes to mere Troy, and expected no more intrusion from any Immortal in support of Danaan or Trojan.

Zeus himself, however, did not go unseen. The Earthshaker, his brother, planet-rattling Poseidon, master of the earth's driving waves, even Poseidon himself, was watching the war, from a spot in a wooded space high up on the deep-forested slopes of Samothrace Island, and not only saw Priam's Troy and the Argive ships and the entirety of the plain between them, the dusty, windy spot run through by the River Scamander and overlooking the waves of the sea : earth-holding Poseidon also saw Zeus Brother-Father avert his eyes away from the war. He had just risen up out of the sea and sat down to watch, his massive form perfumed in sea-spray, and frowned to see the Argives facing ruin by the waterside.

Straightaway down the rocky mountain Poseidon rushed with quick and heavy step, making all the highlands and their forests tremble as he moved, the Immortal. It took only four strides

to get from Island to mainland, to the river Krasis, by
which the town of Aegae sits (in southern Achaea, by Argos).

Two other mighty rivers flow into Krasis and increase
its flood; and deep in its mixed waters stood his glowing palace,
a spot all men know well of, for this deep-water hideaway
of lofty golden form rises undecaying and forever.

He came there, and put his golden-hooved, quick-galloping horses
to his chariot, their wavy manes enormous in extension
when they run; and, himself clothed in gold, stepped onto his chariot,
holding a whip of twisted golden thread; and drove his horses out
from the palace toward the salt-water waves of the sea. When he
dashed through his dark and deep domain all the wondrous creatures
played round him in great number, the seals and fish and sea-monsters,
for they recognized their master, and joyfully made way for
him, as he moved easily through the waters : the bronze axle,
meanwhile, turning the quick wheels of his chariot, stayed dry.
Thus his horses, his wondrous horses (the friskiest alive)
brought their beloved master close to the Argive ships propped up
at an edge of the ancient sea.

A deep cave lies at the bottom of the sea, somewhere, it's said,
between Tenedos and Imbros, though all the words about it
are doubtful ones. There, Poseidon Earthshaker brought his horses
to a standstill. He freed them from the yoke, then tossed them morsels
of ambrosia, which they happily nibbled up. Then, in pleasure,
they would stand in place and await their master's return; for he
was gone to the army of the Achaeans.

Trojans, working together as one integrated force, blazed
all round like wild gusts of fire, following eagerly after

Hector, King Priam's son, heir to the city of Troy, whose cries were matched by those of his men, and the fire shrieked as it burned through the Achaeans, and saw victory ahead—the Trojans taking the Argive ships and burning them to ash, and right there killing all of the best of their men. The Argive army, meanwhile, stood its ground, defending its ships with deliberate silence.

And so, as is their way, the way of the Immortals, who do as we cannot, master Poseidon, Earthshaker and brother of All, came to men's ears through a long-recognizable voice : just now, the voice and body of Calchas, the Argive army's foremost prophet, he who reads significance in bird flight, and in steaming entrails; and, mixed now with Earthshaker, his voice was clear and powerful and persuasive; and his energy in speech was unflagging.

First he strode alongside the two Ajaxes. Eager to kill all Trojans streaming into their camp, they only half-listened while rearming themselves and securing their bronze. And Calchas encouraged them, saying :

"You two Ajaxes will be the saving of us all, if you stay strong and concentrate for as long as it takes. You have no fear, and that's a fine edge. But Hector is fearless too; as a madman is fearless of what reason affrights at. The Trojans are flooding over the collapsed Wall, and spilling through the demolished gate; and just now these two streams are joining into one overwhelming power with Hector as its head, who rages like raving flames of fire through us, as if God and he were one and the same. But you two : just be as you are, and you will stand unyielding, and others will see, and act

as you do; and so we will drive them back from the precious ships,
even if God himself is motivating them.”

Planet-rattling Poseidon in the shape of seer Calchas
raised the staff of prophetic office and touched the Ajaxes
as they hurried along; and in their limbs, in their hands and feet,
they suddenly felt lighter, and their weapons as weightless as
a wisp of fleece in the hand of a shepherd. Then, as a hawk
breaks into sky, quick-winged, and soars over a steep rock,
waiting aloft to start in pursuit of another bird across
the plain : just so Poseidon darted away, Mover of Earth.

Then the two Ajaxes eyed each other, and the quick-moving
son of Oïleus was first to speak, saying :

“Ajax, you see the gods are on our side, regardless of where
we stand; for old Calchas couldn’t move that fast if he were aflame!
Yet he kept with us, and spoke without taking a breath! Old men
can’t do that—but gods can. To know such powerful allies are ours
fills me with a newfound affection for fighting and killing.”

And Telamonian Ajax, colossal in size, greatest
fighter after fast-moving δῖος Achilles (now resting),
answered the other with :

“I hear you. The feel in my hands of these spears arouses me;
and I quiver not with fear but with rage, though my feet stand firm
beneath me. Just let that god give me what I want : face-to-face
with Hector—and I’ll beat his madness and all else out of him.”

In this way the two Ajaxes spoke together, delighted

to be entering combat with some god watching their back.

Meanwhile, Calchas moved with that curious swiftness of foot that didn't fool the Ajaxes, as plain-trembling Poseidon came to the rear of the Achaean battle array, there by the edge of the camp on the beach, where at its outer limits stood Achilles' tent; and he was intent on refreshing all hearts for battle. The soldiers he saw here by the black ships stood slack from exhaustion and sorrow, for they knew the Trojans were flooding into the camp through more than one break in defence. Poseidon watched as a multitude of warriors dropped their heads to let tears fall, because there was nowhere left to go but through Hades gate.

So Lord Poseidon walked among them as Calchas, and spoke out :

"What is this? Are you little boys at war-practice? I never thought I'd see the day when warriors were weeping in misery—for themselves! Though I never thought I'd see the day the Trojans come and flatten us! ὦ πόποι ! The timid deer have stepped from the forest, and have come as jackals, and leopards, and as wolves, and feast over an army with no fight left in it! The bars of the gate are broken; this is it! So are you going to sit here and be overrun? That's how you'll spend your last living day? Bullshit! You womanly weaklings defend what's yours! Make good this cowardly whimpering with medicinal killing! Let your rage out one more time!—let your hands one more time go wild and cut them all down, you, the best of the Achaeans! Killing them will cure you of heartsickness—all this is true! So get into the fight!"

This Calchas said to Teucer and Leïtus and Peneleos and Thoas and Deïpyrus and Meriones : and his

winged words mastered the winds of war and stirred all to frenzy.

So the Earthshaker cheered on the men, who regained all control of order, even with their frenzied hearts; and battle-lines formed, and the two Ajaxes came with them in the centre of the array; and so powerful was the army that Ἄρης could not come along only to laugh and mock at them; nor Athena goddess, who drives ordered armies on : and the two Ajaxes, most distinguished of Achaean warriors on the battlefield (at the moment), met Hector's army head-on. Spear slapped at spear, shield butted shield, helmet knocked against helmet; and man met man : and as the men moved their heads the shimmering horsehair touched each other, when the ridges of their helmets bent forward, so close they stood in formation and fighting. Spears clattered overhead from bold hands and every which way. And the Achaean mind stayed straight, and craved fight.

And the Trojan army forced itself forward all together as one inundation led by δῖος Hector coming on strong.

Just as in wintertime a trickle of a mountain-stream comes to be swollen by rain and melting snow into a torrent raging down the summit of a mountain, and having leapt from its foundations flies down from on high, inexpressibly wondrous, and pushes a boulder off its cliff-face that rolls roundly on, shattering woodland unstoppably as it crashes through trees mercilessly, only to roll down onto a level plain and come to a stop, and then all that speed is gone : in this way, Hector for awhile drove onward and threatened to capture the tents and the ships; but as he saw the prize ahead of him, killing his way forward, the sons of the Achaeans came close

and Hector fought off simultaneous face-to-face combat, double-tipped spears and swords assailing him. He reeled backward from the many blows, finally; then kept getting pushed back; and lost much ground as the Achaeans defended themselves against his awesome power. Then he shouted to everyone around him :

“What is wrong with you men? Lycians, Dardanians, *Trojans*! They’re lined up like a wall—so go on and smash through this second wall! They’ll drop to my spear one by one and we’ll win. All I do is to believe the promise given by Supreme Orderer Zeus!”

So spoke the leader of the Trojans, Hector, Priam’s eldest son, who had much to lose if Zeus was only toying with him; but a suspicion of that kind did not yet cross δῖος Hector’s mind, as he rallied his warriors to increase to the utmost their courage and fighting spirit, while the sun continued to rise over the plain. So, pushing through the front-lines by Hector came warrior Deïphobus, advancing with light battle-step under shelter of his perfectly-balanced shield; so, among the Argives, Meriones raised his shining spear and threw, and did not miss his target, but hit that perfect shield, and the spear-point drove through layers of ox-hide; yet battle-wise Deïphobus, having seen the spear coming, had thrust his shield out to catch it; but his eyes went wide when the spear-point burst out through the back of his ox-hide. Lucky for him, when he’d raised shield he’d snapped the spear, that pitiless death from above, into two pieces, so stopped its forward momentum, and Deïphobus lived to see the twinkling brazen spear-point look him in the eyes. Then concern, which some might call fear, filled Deïphobus’ heart as he contemplated the half-a-spear sticking in his shield; and he looked for death-minded Meriones, but that spearman

was gone. He had withdrawn into his company of fellow warriors, furiously angry that his shattered spear had lost him the victory; and he stomped away along the ships of the Achaeans, meaning to rearm himself with long spears he kept stored in his tent. Meanwhile, the others continued to fight with a ceaseless noise.

Teucer, then, Telamon's son, was the first to cut down his man, warrior Imbrius, son of Mentor, he-who-possesses-many-horses. His life story was like many another's : lost to history. He had lived in a town somewhere near Troy, Pedaeum. There he lived before the sons of the Achaeans came, and was husband to Medesicaste, one of the many illegitimate daughters of King Priam. But when the far-sailing ships of the Danaans came, he returned to Troy as a man renowned among the Trojans, and he lived in Priam's palace; and the king loved him equal to his children born in wedlock. But that was that for Imbrius, when son of Telamon Teucer ran his spear in under his ear and yanked it back out; and long night came to honoured Imbrius, endless night, and he toppled down like an ash-tree aspiring high on a summit conspicuous from all round, then its bark is cut by the bronze, and its tender leaves come to rest upon the earth; just so he fell to the ground and his bronze armour rattled round him. So Teucer set out to strip that armour. Hector, though, watching him bend to the corpse, sent a shining spear flying his way. But Teucer, looking into Hector's eyes, leaned aside, and the spear flew past him close enough for Teucer to feel its whisk, and it struck good Amphinomus, a leader of the noble Epeians, dead-centre in the chest, and he dropped to earth, and his bronze armour rattled. Hector, then, who had vanquished him by fate, charged forward to tear the helmet

off the head of the dead man; but Ajax charged forward, too, and lunged with his spear at Hector, who saw bronze glimmering before him and quit running just in time, because the sharp tip hit his armour, but went no further, for Hector was exceedingly battle-wise; so the spear only touched him as he came to a halt, but it caused him to step back from the dead men, which the Argives then dragged off.

It were the two leaders of the Athenians, Stichius and the wounded Menestheus, who carried the dead body of Amphimachus away into the Achaeon army. Imbrius, meanwhile, the two Ajaxes dragged off roughly, their spirits mad with war and its compulsive resolve to kill. Just as two lions, who seize a goat fleeing from sly-fanged dogs and carry it over the dense undergrowth of the forest, holding it between them with their strong jaws high above the ground, just so the two Ajaxes hauled Imbrius high in the air, then dropped him at their feet, and stripped the body of its armour; and Ajax, son of Oïleus, cut the head off its tender neck. Burning with rage at Amphimachus' death, he flung the bare head with a swing of his body like a ball over the crowd of his warriors, who watched it soar long through the air and descend at Hector's feet, where it smashed into pieces.

Poseidon, meanwhile, marched along the rear of the Argive army, minded to rouse the weary men at the tents and ships; and saw Idomeneus rushing past in full panoply of arms and armour on a war errand.

So Poseidon appeared to the man in shape and voice of son of Andraemon, Thoas, who throughout all of Pleuron and high

Calydon was best to reign over the Aetolians there,
and was honoured by his people as a god. Idomeneus,
then, though quick to move on, stopped in honour of the man.

And planet-shaking Poseidon spoke out, saying :

“Idomeneus, leader and counsellor of men, may I ask
if the Trojan threat is broken? Are the Achaeans now safe?”

And Idomeneus heard the taunt in Thoas’ speech
and chose to ignore it just now, whether it be specific
to him, or general to the Argives; and answered him :

“No,” he said. “Men and their names are still dying far from Argos.
I don’t understand it; it must be a god; it’s inconceivable
to lose this war. But what are you doing here? You love to fight.
Do not stand down now but get in there, and drive on every man!”

And Poseidon answered him :

“Idomeneus, we either go home today victorious,
or lay dead in the air for the relish of bitches’ burrowing
snouts. None of us will desist from our purpose; with our whole heart
we’ll fight. So come then! Your armour shimmers upon you like rays
round the sun. Let’s be quick about it and get back amongst it,
if we may do any good. Even the cowardly, when joined together,
therein find a degree of strength.”

And Idomeneus barked one word back :

“Cowardly?”

But even as he spoke Poseidon in the shape of Thoas
 sped away beyond mortal means, and returned to the battle;
 and, watching this, Idomeneus could only shake his head
 at all of it. So he went to his tent, where he retrieved two
 long spears, and the feel of the deadly ashwood shafts in his hands
 made him feel as Zeus might, when holding his sparkling lightning
 high on shimmering Olympus, revealing Truth to people
 below : even so Idomeneus sparkled like a god
 as he ran his way back toward the battle; and along the way
 he met Meriones, his attendant, heading to the tent
 he'd just come from, to retrieve his own bronze-tipped spear.

And mighty Idomeneus spoke out, saying :

“Meriones, why have you left the battlefield? Are you hurt?
 Perhaps you carry a report for me? Otherwise you should
 not be wandering around idly, but be out there in the fight.”

And Meriones answered him :

“Idomeneus, I've come to get another spear.
 Mine broke against the shield of Deïphobus.”

And Idomeneus responded :

“Deïphobus? Well—If you want a spear you'll find as many
 as you can carry in my tent, all the trophies of my dead :
 their last throw were by Trojans killed by me. And as I like to
 get up close and personal when I kill, you'll also find as many
 shields, helmets and breast-plates (and everything bright) to make you glad.”

And Meriones answered him :

“Yes, and I too have many arms and armour of dead Trojans in my tent, but I can’t very well carry them all round with me. And if you were out on the field you wouldn’t see me ‘wandering’, but fighting at the front, where the satisfaction of the kill is sweetest. Some other Argives round here many know nothing of that; but you, I think, Idomeneus, should know better.”

And Idomeneus replied :

“I know who you are, so why waste words about it? Get going! No more standing here like children; someone might call us cowards. Go to the tent and get a goddamn spear.”

And so man-killing Meriones rushed to the tent, and took a death-tipped bronze spear. Then he ran back to Idomeneus, who had prepared a chariot in the meantime; for both men were ready to slaughter. And just as man-destroying Ἄρης equips for war, carefully and calmly, and together with him comes Panic, his son, just as strong and resolute as courage, who turns the heart of even the mightiest warrior to flight : just so Idomeneus and Meriones secured all their arms and armour conscientiously, knowing that Ἄρης might take either side, according to his whim of the moment; so they were eager to force a mighty death onto their foe. So they cracked the whip, and flew forward in their blinding armour toward the plain, and the fight. As their well-harnessed horses raced on, Meriones contemplated the layout of battle stretched too close along the outlay of tents and ships, and turned

to Idomeneus, and spoke :

“Idomeneus,” he said, “what do you think of the design of battle? Where do you want us to go? We look holding firm on the right; and the centre is no place for us; so it seems as if we’re heading around to the left—where, indeed, we look scattered and overwhelmed and in need of reinforcement.”

And mighty Idomeneus answered him :

“Yes, in the centre, the two Ajaxes are cutting their numbers down. Let them be first defence of the ships—if it comes to that. If they see them bringing fire, God help them from their own pyres. Let Achilles keep his quick feet up; Telamonian Ajax yields to no man; neither bronze nor stone will bring him down. For us, then, head to the left of the line. Then we’ll find out what Ἄρης has in mind, whether finally the victory be theirs, or ours.”

Thus spoke Idomeneus, as Meriones drove the horses into the fray at the left, which, mighty Idomeneus saw uneasily, was pressuring closely their precious ships. Then, Idomeneus commanded Meriones to stop.

When the enemy saw Idomeneus come into battle like a gust a flame (both he and his attendant together skilfully decorated with exquisite arms and armour), the Trojans called to each other among the jostling bodies to face off against them all together at once in a rush; and a colossal battle raved by the sterns of the black ships, a confusion of heated and combat-maddened bodies of pitiless warriors. And as clear-toned winds are driven

faster and faster, whistling up to a shrieking while eddying into a whirlwind, when the storm comes; and the dust comes to cover the roads and the paths and the ways; and the winds whip the dust upward into one obscuring mist, only to drop enough to keep the roads hidden; and confused are all things out in the land : just so the warriors joined as an obscure assembly hard to follow, as swords clashed and shields caught arrows; each man was hot in heart to bring down the next with the bronze edge. The darkened air above them bristled with the pitiless tips of man-consuming spears, quick bringers of long death, which men use to cut through flesh, and take lives away. And many eyes were dazzled by the blaze of bronze-flashing helmets with their shuddering horsehair, and bright-polished breast-plates, and shining shields, in the confusion. Only the cool-hearted would rejoice at the sight of such horror.

Thus were the two Immortal sons of double-dealing Cronos, themselves divided in direction, furnishing terrible pain to mortal men. Zeus would prefer this combat close by the ships to benefit the Trojans and Hector, so giving glory to Achilles, quickest in the race of men, when the time came. For Zeus would not have the Argives ultimately fall before the Trojans at Ilium, for he wished to make sea-goddess Thetis happy, and granting victory to her mighty-hearted son might satisfy his hopes. But Poseidon, having snuck up (so he thought) from the ancient sea, went among the Achaeans in the midst of the tempestuousness to rouse their war-strength; for it brought him low to see them suffering terrible losses to the horse-taming Trojans. So he nursed a mighty anger at Zeus for this, and did what sneaky work he might to hearten the Argives. Both were the sons of Cronos and Rhea, and shared in the blood of their all-powerful race. Zeus was the first-born,

however, and much wiser. And while Zeus was looking elsewhere, Poseidon snuck about the Argive army, applying sly aid to the warriors, appearing to them as one of their own, as he roused their battle-spirit. So their bitter rivalry knotted both sides up in chaos, and kept them toiling in ever-tightening war, where many warriors fell in death.

Then Idomeneus, though half-grey under his bright helmet, called to his men to follow; and he leapt into a company of Trojans, driving them to panic, and flight. And holding his spear-shaft up at the tip he plunged death into Othryoneus. His breast-plate with its display of ornamentation offered no protection from the spear-point that stuck fast in his belly, then was yanked out, and the blood spilled; and he fell with a rattle.

Idomeneus stood over the writhing body and spoke :

“Your name is Othryoneus of Cablesus. You came here to ask for the hand of the most beautiful of the king’s daughters, Cassandra. You came here empty-handed, with no bridal-gifts, but you promised Priam to undertake the defence of Troy, and show us all a mighty work, and the old man bowed his head, as they do in stories, and gave you the chance for her marriage. So you came here today determined to make good on the promise. Yes, Othryoneus, I heard the story. Unfortunately you met me. But be happy, because things are not all bad. If you’re able to show us all a mighty work, as you said you would to Priam, then Agamemnon himself will give you one of his daughters, his most beautiful one, and you will have a mighty life. But first you have to help us obliterate Troy. So come with me to the ships, and we’ll agree on a bride-price,

and I promise we'll go easy on you."

Thus spoke Idomeneus, while he dragged the writhing body
by the foot through the confused combat. But Asius saw him,
Asius, who'd brought sleek horses from the river Selleïs
and thought them dearer than his army commander's orders,
and he came down from his chariot to rescue the writhing
Othryoneus, and he felt on his shoulders the breath of
his panting horses as his driver led them close behind him.

And he looked up at Idomeneus, who had already
anticipated him; and a spear drove through King Asius
clean through his throat under his chin, a skilful hit of the mark.
And he toppled as a poplar falls, or a tall oak that joiners
cut away from mountaintops with their freshly-sharpened axes
to become timber for seafaring ships. So Asius dropped
to the earth, seeing the bloody dust in his hand, and moaning.

His driver, meanwhile, having lost his wits, stood numb with terror
rather than take the horses and flee; but he came to, when he
felt a spear transfix his belly, sent from strong Antilochus.
As with his king, his exquisite breast-plate was a useless defence—
so he discovered as he tumbled into the dust, where he
gasped out his life while Antilochus, great-hearted Nestor's son,
led the lovely horses away into his well-armoured lines.

Deïphobus, then, deep in grief for Asius, came up close
to mighty Idomeneus and let his shining spear fly.
But that mighty warrior had his brilliant eyes on his foe,
so the spear hissed past his body, grazing over and away
from him, while he crouched behind his treasured shield, perfectly
balanced as all the shining shields of the Argive leaders were;

this one, a well-stitched strata of ox-hide capped with flashing bronze, to dazzle enemy sight, had carved upon it an odd design of concentric rings (a well-known Mycenaean trait) to not only dazzle but confuse just long enough for death to visit a hesitant opponent. But while the spear of Deïphobus passed him by, some other spear came in fast at Idomeneus, but it shattered against that massive shield of his, and he paid no further attention to it, for stray spears were contemptible and cowardly—as warrior heroes preferred face-to-face contests, and not far-away sneaky work. Idomeneus liked dispensing death up close and personal. But even as his treasured shield echoed with the battering from that spear, the spear launched from the strong hand of Deïphobus had not flown past in vain, but struck great warrior Hypsenor deep in his liver, and straightaway his knees gave way, and his colossal body, the son of Hippasus, collapsed to earth.

And Deïphobus exulted in his kill, and shouted out for the Argives to hear him, saying :

“There is my answer to your murder of Asius! Now he won’t go down to Hades alone, but enter its rotten gates with one of your own, to accompany him along the way!”

So he shouted, and enraged the Argives, and especially battle-wise Antilochus, who sorrowed for his fallen man, and ran out before Deïphobus to get to Hypsenor, and used his shield as cover, while two fellow warriors, Mecisteus, Echius’ son, and δῖος Alastor, raised up the groaning, writhing body, and took him to the ships.

And all this made Idomeneus madder, more murderous.
 His killing hands did not cease even for a moment, but with
 greater strength and fury he shoved many a Trojan down into
 black night, all the while fending off futile attacks from
 the enemy. Whether he lived or died had no meaning now.
 The future didn't cross his mind, not as he thrived among death.

Now Zeus had a fondness for Aesyetes and his warrior
 son Alcathous, whose wife was lovely Hippodameia,
 oldest daughter of illustrious Anchises. She excelled all
 other girls her age in beauty and hand-skill and understanding,
 and her parents had loved her with all of their heart in their halls.
 So one of the best men of colossal Troy had won her hand
 in marriage, even Alcathous, whom now Lord Poseidon
 tamed before Idomeneus, for he bewitched both his eyes,
 and palsied his limbs, so he would have no power to avoid
 the strides of oncoming death : and Idomeneus drew sword,
 and came to the man as if approaching a pillar or tree,
 and cut his throat. And beloved Alcathous fell to earth,
 and Idomeneus pitched his spear into his right hand
 and spiked it through the heart of the man, beloved of Zeus,
 then stepped back to watch the death. And while the heart beat its last,
 it made the spear pole quiver, until the long vibrations stopped,
 and the spear became still. But the frenzy of "Ἄρης (war-god
 who wasn't even paying the slightest attention to Troy)
 still motivated mighty Idomeneus, who exulted
 over the dead man, while looking up to shout out :

"Deïphobus, the one and only, soon dead and gone : have we
 made good our exchange? Three Trojans fallen for one Achaean!
 So Asius didn't require a guide to Hell after all!"

So he spoke, and Deïphobus hesitated, wondering
 if he should bring a second man by him as reinforcement
 against mighty Idomeneus, or face him alone. As he
 wondered (which occupied only the duration of a sunbeam
 flashing on bronze), he thought it better to get magnificent
 Aeneas to stand beside him. So he rushed through the battle,
 and found him not at the front, but off on his own, and raising
 no weapon against the enemy; for trash talk flung between
 the opposition had worked against Aeneas in the instance.
 (It was something long in the past, that his father Anchises
 was ousted from Troy's throne by Priam, so that δῖος Aeneas
 should one day rule a kingdom in happiness. Yet, as it was,
 Aeneas fought with the best of the warriors in defence
 of the city, yet received no respect from its noble king.)

So Deïphobus came near to the young hero and spoke :

"Aeneas, great arm and mind of us all, noble Aeneas,
 now you must show the best of yourself, before the eyes of all,
 and defend your sister's family! Would you have your sister
 die? along with her husband? and the king? By that time you'll be
 dead. Better, you come with me and kill goddamn Idomeneus."

So spoke Deïphobus, whose speech ignited Aeneas'
 battle-minded spirit; and together they went to seek out
 Idomeneus, focused single-minded on taking him down.

Meanwhile, not the slightest thought of retreat had stirred the mind
 of Idomeneus, as if he were some boy, and happy
 with but one win, so takes excuse to leave to field : no, this man

gave no ground, just as a boar in the mountains puts all his trust
 in his strength, and attacks the noisy stir of hunters that face
 him, there in a lonely spot; and his back bristles up and down,
 and his two eyes gleam with heat, and he scrapes his upper tusks,
 his sharp-tipped cutters, all along his lower tusks, to make them
 lethal-sharp as well : and he commits his strength to man and hound :
 just so Idomeneus, who drove forward through the Trojans,
 giving no ground; and while he killed this man and that he saw
 magnificent Aeneas approach, and shouted out to his men
 while thrusting and hacking, calling out for Ascalaphus τ'
 Aphareus τε Deïpyrus τε Meriones τε
 καὶ Antilochus, all master warriors, encouraging
 them with winged words :

“This way, all of you, now! Aeneas comes!
 We must take him together!”

So spoke Idomeneus. All of the Argives knew of fast-
 moving Aeneas and his slaughtering powers, nourished by
 his blossoming youth.

One word Idomeneus, half-grey under his bright helmet,
 kept to himself :

“If only I were his age,” he thought, “then victory would be
 mine alone.”

And as he thought this, all the warriors he'd summoned gathered
 close, side by side, breathing one spirit of fury between them,
 each and all leaning their shoulders into their shields, like a wall.

And opposite them Aeneas shouted out to his own men,
 calling on Deiphobus, and Paris, and δῖος Agenor,
 all foremost fighters and leaders of Trojans, along with him.

Then came a great shift in position, as their army followed
 them, as the flock follows the ram from the field to the water,
 and the herdsman smiles at heart; just so Aeneas smiled,
 when he saw the Trojan army marching behind him.

So the two sides met over the body of Alcathous,
 whom Zeus loved, yet lay dead regardless. They clashed in close combat
 with spears and swords, and their bronze breast-plates beat with the fearful clash
 of weaponry upon armour, leaving dents, as lust for war came over all.
 Amid the mangling bodies moved the two best men, Aeneas
 and Idomeneus, both peers of Ἄρης (as if that god cared to look).
 Both warriors moved with one and the same hope : to slice open
 the flesh of the other with the pitiless bronze. Aeneas
 let fly, but Idomeneus, watching him all the while,
 avoided the bronze spear, and the sharp tip stuck in the dirt,
 and the long ash pole wobbled there, its leather hold in the middle
 still warm with the anger of Aeneas, who snarled at his lost
 chance. Then, with a laugh, Idomeneus ignored Aeneas
 before everyone, and flung at Oenomaus, a perfect
 cast, that struck him in the belly, shattering his convex breast-
 plate; and the bronze continued into his body, and then all
 his bowels spilled out onto the dust. Warrior Oenomaus
 felt the sharp tip rip out of his body with a tug from mighty
 Idomeneus, then fell and touched fresh earth for one last time.

And the shadow of the long death-bringing spear
 shrouded the length of the dead man while Idomeneus
 considered the final humiliation of tearing off

the rest of the armour; then, he thought best to get a move on, since spears, arrows, stones and all else were coming fast at him and around him. And the man he'd just vanquished had left him with a mixed feeling; amid the tireless battle he was annoyed to discover that his own body wasn't untiring, that his feet weren't as steadfast as in former times; as age has more power than power itself. Then he thought, 'If I had the youth of, say, Aeneas, I would charge into hand-to-hand fighting until the sun went down.' As it was, he only reluctantly withdrew from the centre of the battle, where he'd successfully defended against the pitiless bronze. And as Idomeneus withdrew, he found further displeasure with his feet, for they flew more slowly than in years before.

Then Deïphobus let fly at mighty Idomeneus, whose hate for him burned constant and forever. But he missed him again, the great Deïphobus (thus did Idomeneus rate his feet a little too harshly); but the spear-point ripped through Ascalaphus' shoulder, son of Enyalius; so the wounded man lost his own feet, and tumbled in the dust.

Now, Enyalius, father of the dying Ascalaphus, was a true grandson of terrible, man-slaughtering Ἄρης; and was himself a god, the god of soldiers, whose mother was dread Enyo, war-goddess hovering over the battlefield. Enyalius was honoured by the Argives with festivals and shrines and statues; yet the grandson of Ἄρης lay wounded regardless, and past saving. But word on Olympus travels

fast, and when excruciating Ἄρης , god insatiate
 for spilled blood, learned of Ascalaphus's life-consuming
 wound, the rage inside him swelled to dimensions inexpressible,
 and he went to pounce on the havocked plain. Zeus Father, however,
 stopped him, by trapping him in golden clouds; for no god now on
 Olympus had permission to enter the war : such was the word
 of Zeus.

So they fought over the writhing body of Ascalaphus
 in hand-to-hand combat; and son of Priam Deïphobus
 tore the helmet off the hapless Argive's head. Doing this, however,
 brought a dagger blade into his arm, from the hand of fast-moving
 Meriones. So Deïphobus dropped the flashing helmet,
 which hit the ground with a clatter; and Meriones leapt at
 Deïphobus, swooping in like a vulture with razor-sharp points;
 but Polites, another son of Priam, sped sidewise by
 the eyes of Meriones, taking Deïphobus with him
 with a strong arm round his waist. Meriones did not pursue,
 only laughed, as Deïphobus was taken from the battlefield;
 Polites led him to a chariot and horses, which brought
 him to the city; and he ground his teeth, and groaned in fury,
 as the dark blood gushed from the wound in his killing arm.

All the others fought on, and the shrill voice of war filled the air
 entire with hateful noise. Then Aeneas sprung on Aphareus,
 Caletor's son, who was facing him, making it an effortless
 throw of the spear from Aeneas straight through the air and throat
 of Aphareus, poor Aphareus, whose head slacked to one side
 as his body dropped under him, and his gleaming bronze helmet
 and ornamented shield tumbled with him to earth; and death
 took him away forever; while Antilochus, waiting

for the right moment, leaped at Thoön, who showed his back to him :
 so Antilochus skilfully severed Thoön's spine, then yanked
 the bloody spear back out as Thoön fell to earth with useless legs.
 Thoön, amid the turmoil, stretched out his arms to his friends,
 and called to them, but no one heard him, and in the battle-strife
 he was trampled on; and died unrecognizable. But he wasn't
 dead yet when Antilochus sprung over to rip his armour
 off his feeble body, glancing terribly this way and that
 as the Trojans closed in round him, their spear-points darting out
 at him first here, now there; but Antilochus dodged them all,
 and received not even a scratch from the flurry of flashing
 death : for sneaky Earth-shaking Poseidon protected this son
 of Nestor—which was busy work, for Antilochus was never
 free of the enemy, but always fighting among them,
 always in motion, at home in battle, whirling this way
 and that way and leaving dead men now here, now there,
 delivering ruin either with a skilled throw of the spear,
 or with his bare hands.

But Antilochus was being watched—by Adamas, grandson
 of Troy's Queen Hecuba. So as Antilochus raised his spear
 to take aim, he felt the heaviness of a powerful strike
 against his shield, that had seemingly come from out of nowhere;
 but busy, sneaky, Earth-shaking Poseidon protected the son
 of Nestor, by snapping the death-tip off the shaft and flinging
 this now-worthless bronze off and away. But the long ashwood shaft
 of the spear kept going : it rebounded up from the shield-face
 and barely missed impaling Antilochus in the face,
 as it flew past him and away. Surprised to be alive,
 Antilochus looked to his shield, and saw that the spear
 wood had snapped into two pieces. Half still stuck in his shield-face,

an inscrutable sign of the dark-haired lord Poseidon.

Adamas, meanwhile, also marvelling at Antilochus' luck, retreated into his band of men; but Meriones killed him with a cast of his spear, which pierced cruelly between groin and navel, the spot where Ἄρης delivers a most grisly pain to sorry mortals. So in that terrible spot the spear stuck fast, and the wounded Adamas writhed around, just as a mountain bull struggles at the bonds thrown round him by herdsmen, who then drag him away strenuously : just so Adamas struggled, but not for long : for hero Meriones came close, and pulled out the spear from his body; and death, the goddess of death, came closer still, and closed his eyelids.

Then in face-to-face fight Helenus drove through Deïpyrus' forehead with a shining Thracian sword, a heavy weapon that sliced through helmets as through a wheel of beeswax; then Helenus battered his head down to a mixture of bone and helmet fragments. And Deïpyrus' shadow went down to Hades, to abide in the darkness there.

Son of Atreus Menelaus, meanwhile, saw the ruin of the Achaean warrior, and answered by raising his spear against deadly Helenus and casting it : and the other raised his bow and sent an arrow from the string : and Helenus, son of Priam, struck Menelaus clean in the centre of his chest, but the arrow bounced off the heavy breast-plate there. The arrow bounced up and away like grain winnowing along a threshing floor, when a wind whistles in from afar, so marvellous was the shining bronze plate protecting Menelaus. And even as the bitter arrow

bounced away, his spear struck Helenus in the hand
that held the bow, and fixed the hand of Helenus to the bow.
So the wounded Helenus withdrew into his company
of men, with his hand lowered by his side, and the long ashwood
pole scraped a line in the dust behind him as he went away.
The bronze was then extracted from both bow and hand
by great-hearted Agenor, who applied a fleecy bandage
to the wound, then bound up the arm in a sling of well-twisted
wool that his attendant carried with him among his supplies.

Now Peisander, a Trojan soldier otherwise unknown
to history, went straight at Menelaus, hoping to win
for himself a name illustrious throughout the world of men;
but he ended up charging through the open gates of Hades.
So the hopeful Trojan came on, and war-wise Menelaus
saw the spear rising in the aggressor's hand; and son of Atreus
let fly, but missed; and Peisander lunged with his spear, and hammered
the shield of illustrious Menelaus, but was unable
to push the bronze-tip through to his body, for the shield caught it,
and held it firmly in its many layers of ox-hide, while
the ashen spear snapped into pieces and fell away. Peisander,
however, continued advancing with great expectation
of victory. But Menelaus drew his sword, his silver-
studded beauty reflecting the battlefield's firelight,
and sprang at Peisander; and while he saw the Trojan look
to the shining sword, Peisander produced a battle-axe
from under his valorous shield. (This weapon was a fine piece
to inspect at leisure. Its wedged bronze head, sharp as an eagle's
claws, was socketed by a handle of well-smoothed olive-wood.)
So the two of them fell upon one another like raging beasts.
Raising the axe-blade high, Peisander drove it down onto

Menelaus' helmet; but even as the keen blade touched the crest by the pocket where the horsehair flows from, Menelaus turned his head, and the axe-edge scraped down the helmet-side, leaving a long incision there. And Menelaus struck him on the head over the nose with his sword handle, then dropped the weapon and plunged his two thumbs into Peisander's two eyes, and he burst the eyeballs, and hot blood gushed over his hands; and whatever came out of the Trojan's head fell into the dust and was lost. Then Peisander, he too, fell into the dust, taking his great expectations with him into blind death. Then Menelaus kicked the man flat, and set down his foot solidly on his chest, and spoke :

"You evil bastard," he said, "that's what Trojans receive from Achaeans when we're treated with ugliness—I give you ugliness, you meagre arrogant bastard filth. Your city will fall to the power of Zeus, and all your people destroyed."

So spoke Menelaus, and kicked away the battle-axe, which was lost amid the tumult, just like Peisander's hopes. Then δῖος Menelaus absorbed himself in the front lines.

But the son of King Pylaemenes, fierce Harpalion, who had followed his beloved father to Ilium and combat, sprang at Menelaus; thereby losing hope of returning to his homeland. Taking his chance, he lunged with his spear at the hero's shining shield from close by, yet still failed to penetrate its defence. So he slipped back among his men in the hope of dodging fate, and looked this way and that in case any charging Argive warrior was coming for him, to cut through his flesh with the bronze. And an arrow flew in

from Meriones : and its bronze-tipped, triple-barbed arrow-head sank into Harpalion's right buttock. And the arrow went into his bladder—a precision shot that hit the mark between the bones of the pelvis. Menelaus had already killed his father some time before; and now Harpalion sat down on the earth just where he was, and breathed out the last of his life in the arms of his friends; and his dark blood gushed out onto the earth, and was drunk up by the dust. Just as an earthworm comes up out of the soil and into the light, so he lay there, about to go underground. And when he died, the great-souled Paphlagonians tended to his body. They lowered him into a chariot and brought him to Troy, feeling sorry for the dead man. But Harpalion would have no vengeance, for his father was gone.

And Paris, friend to the great-souled Paphlagonians, who had once kindly received him as a guest, filled with a slaughtering rage; and for their sake he strung a death-tipped arrow and shot it at the Argives. Now among the enormous number of Argives was a man called Euchenor. He was the son of the prophet Polyidus, who lived as a wealthy man in a palace in Corinth. So Euchenor had known exactly what was in store for him when he stepped onto his ship and departed for Troy and combat; for many times his old father, the good Polyidus, had spoken to his son of fate, which one has no chance of outrunning. His dear son Euchenor must either suffer illness and waste away to death at home in his halls, or go to Troy and be vanquished by the ships of the Argives. So Euchenor came to the Scamander plain, and there he died, when the arrow from Paris came to penetrate his throat, just under his jaw. Then his life left his body, but the long

arm of death wrapped it round, and drew it down under the earth,
and brought his spirit into abominable endless night.

So the two armies fought deep-delv'd like twin fires joined
as one monumental blaze, and its wild roaring increased;
and Hector, beloved of Zeus, pushed forward through spear and sword,
and smashed through the dense-packed lines of Achaean shield-bearers,
and saw the precious ships ahead of him, there by the shore
of the ancient sea, propped up on the sand where the salt water
rushes up then retreats continuously. And Hector had no
knowledge of his army's troubles on the left flank, as the Argives
were rising in strength there again (and no one there would ever
know if it were Poseidon Earthshaker favouring their power,
or not); but Hector had no care at all but moving forward
in his bronze armour, as the arrows flew in as a shower
of death at him and the Trojans, as the precious black ships stood
vulnerable in his sight—the ships of Ajax, and the ships
of Protesilaus, the first man to fall in the long war,
whose wife Laodamia thereafter mourned her whole life through.
And just there, the Trojans were streaming over the collapsing
wall, and the battle was at its most furious and raving.

And the arrows rushing in flew from the bright-shining bows
of the Locrians, who shunned close fight, wearing no armour
to protect them, having neither shield nor helmet; but they fought
only with bows, and with well-twisted linen slings that sent stones
flying, hoping to break up the closely-packed Trojan warriors
and put them to flight. And there with the Locrians by the ships
were the Boeotians καὶ Ionians καὶ noble Phthians
τῆ the illustrious Epeians, all furiously keeping
Hector and his men from pressing forward; none of these peoples,

however, stopped δῖος Hector, who came on like a flame of fire;
 and the Athenians, too, were pushing back, hoping to save
 their ships. And in the midst of the fray were the two Ajaxes :
 as quick-moving Ajax, son of Oileus, would never not fight
 by Telamon Ajax's side, not for a moment; but just
 as two oxen yoked side by side work the well-wood-workéd plough
 through the deep-soiled field, and the sweat gushes from the base
 of their horns as the pair alone labour within the fences,
 cutting the furrow to the limits of the field; even so
 did the two Ajaxes fight vigorously side by side
 and gave no ground. Even so, Hector continued his onslaught,
 struggling through the mass of shields butting him on all sides
 and the spear points flitting by; and his fellow warrior there
 with him, the trusted Polydamas, called out to him, saying :

"Hector! Hear this one word! Ahead there's a warrior
 who's going to stand up at some point and fight!"

And Hector responded :

"Show him to me."

And he moved on, δῖος Hector, leaving Polydamas
 to hold their position just there; but Hector kept advancing;
 and the great-hearted Trojans came streaming into the camp
 over the collapsed parts of the Wall; but he saw his warriors
 exhausted from their struggle to get to this favourable
 position, and many of them, now inside the camp, dawdled
 with their arms and armour in scattered groups, having fallen back
 from battle, though the ships lay before them, just beyond
 the mighty press of Achaeans. And for the first time Hector

wondered if God had indeed willed him victory; or perhaps he would never return to the city again. Then he heard trusted Polydamas crying out behind him to marshal the forces, both Trojan and allies; and they came to Panthous' son Polydamas; and the Trojans began to close ranks.

So Hector with redoubled strength hacked his way up to the sterns of the ships, looking around him for his best warriors—Helenus and Adamas and Deïphobus and Asius among them—but the only ones around him now were bloody with wounds; and some were falling, there by the sterns of the ships, destroyed by Argive hands, as the spears and arrows and stones came flying in, and the Argive foot-forces sprung at them in flashing bronze armour. Then Hector saw Alexandros by the Wall on the left, hateful husband to Helen, withdrawn from the fight. So Hector stormed up to his brother, and spoke :

“Hateful Paris! Where is Deïphobus? And Helenus?
And Adamas? And Asius? And Othryoneus?
We can kill them off now, or be killed. Which is it?”

And Alexandros responded :

“Dear brother, all those you ask of are dead. Well, Deïphobus and Helenus live, but are wounded, and away from the fight. Each was wounded in the arm, curiously. And why ‘hateful’? I am not at fault for all this. But our mother gave birth to no cowards, so lead me in any direction you wish, according to the command of your heart. We’ll fight as we can, but no greater, however eager the man, for we are very tired.”

Thus spoke Alexandros. And Hector indeed roused the men
 with a battle-cry to fight, and the Trojan warriors came
 with him—Cebriones καὶ Polydamas καὶ Phalces καὶ
 Orthaeus τε καὶ godlike Polyphetes—and they went
 to where the combat and noise were greatest. They came on
 just as vexatious winds join as a whirlwind beneath Father
 Zeus’ thunder, and the divine storm mixes with the salt sea,
 and the loud-roaring waters bubble and boil with waves
 crested with foam; one after another; so the Trojans
 in close order, glittering in bronze, followed behind
 their leaders toward the Achaeans and the black ships.

Hector led the way, Priam’ son, man-destroying peer of Ἴφης .
 He held before him his heavy shield, a thick-packed compression
 of dry ox-hides, with much bronze welded on; and his eyes looked out
 from his helmet shining in the sun.

And Ajax son of Telamon came before him,
 and stood his ground. And the warriors around them
 slowed their fighting to watch. And Ajax spoke :

“Most mighty Trojan, come to me. I say that whatever curse
 Zeus put on us Achaeans is now gone. If you step closer
 you’ll walk into a plague. And you’ll have no hands left
 to fight a defence. These hands you see will soon bring your city
 down to nothing. As for you, you’re going home, while the city
 still stands, but you’ll be carried home dead over the dusty plain.”

Thus spoke Ajax, and all the Argives behind him cheered.

And δῖος Hector answered him :

“Ajax, what gibberish you speak. Come to me, and you shall fall.
My spear shall tear your lily-like body for the dogs and birds
to feast on, while you lay unburied by your burning black ships.”

Thus spoke Hector, and stepped forward, and the Trojans behind him
roared a mighty battle-cry, and the Achaeans opposite them
joined to raise the cry up resounding through the sky to the light
of the sun and Zeus.

End of

Book XIII

Book XIV

Nestor, then, drowsy from his continual draughts of red wine, came to hear, amid his stupor, the clamour of shrieks and cries; a forlorn sound, and a noise that had been coming ever closer to his tent; and he finally spoke out to hero Machaon, who, himself tamed from the recent gory surgery on his thigh and the frustration of it all, listened to the king's foremost friend :

"I must go to the door of the tent," said Nestor, "and look to, and see how things are. The sound of war has risen in volume while we've sat here with our wine, and I hear voices now so near to us that I can comprehend particular words in the confusion of battle-noise. But you, good Machaon, please, stay where you sit. You savour the soothing red wine, until my lovely Hecamede has heated your bath, and returns to lead you to the warm water. She will wash the blood from your body. I, however, go quickly now to see what is what with us."

So spoke old man Nestor, long in years and words and experience.

Nestor and Thrasymedes, father and son, had exchanged shields, for reasons known only to them; so Nestor now took in hand his son's exquisite shield, whose face of bronze shone brightly even in the shaded tent. And he took in hand a slender lethal spear, tipped with sharp point of bronze. So he went to the door of the tent, and passed through into the mid-morning sunlight, and at once saw, there in front of him no farther than a stone's throw, a horrible sight : the Achaeans in the back of the lines looking completely confused, and falling to an oncoming wave of impassioned Trojans. And he also saw that the great stone Wall had collapsed.

As when the deep dark sea swells soundlessly to a high crest,
 delicately indicating the coming blasts of hard winds,
 but vaguely yet, nor do the waves crash down, on this side or that,
 until the decided wind blows from the heights of Zeus Orderer :

just so, the old man mind's divided, when the winds of war came
 to him : should he charge into battle with his fast-galloping
 horses? Or go seek out supreme commander Agamemnon?
 And as Nestor stood there pondering, and burning away all
 effect of wine on mind and body, he decided the best
 course to take : to go seek out the son of Atreus. And so he went.

And everywhere bodies were pierced with swords and double-tipped spears;
 and the sound of bronze on shield was a clamorous clanging noise
 enough to deafen, as just here the men fought on unwearied.

Now the Achaean ships were propped up in ordered rows, a great
 assemblage of black ships lying in parallel in a confident
 square on the sand of the beach, pressed by a fair wind off the sea.
 Problem was, the ships were of such a multitude that they narrowed
 the space that the Achaean men could move through, behind what was
 left of the wall, which had been built just beyond the hindmost ships,
 those that had come last to the fight. But the ships of Odysseus,
 of Diomedes, and of Agamemnon were closest to the edgy
 shore, for these warriors had come first to Troy; and now each
 of these men stood together, each wounded, at the hindmost
 of the squared ships, each leaning on his spear, perhaps even
 propped up by it, and in a group they grieved and were troubled,
 and their spirit was pained. Then δῖος Nestor came among them
 and they winced to see him, for as they stood there wounded by

the bronze, the sight of Nestor suggested final defeat,
and coming death.

Then Agamemnon raised his voice and spoke, saying :

“Nestor, one of our best, why have you left the field? I fear
you come with news of Hector’s threats fulfilled, and all his words
of menace come to be. That can’t be so; the ships aren’t burning
yet. We’re not all dead yet. Out with it! Have I become hated
in heart by all, as much as by the one man Achilles?”

And Nestor answered him :

“What you say is upon us; this terrible day has come
to us. Only terrible-thundering Zeus himself could have
made this happen. Our Wall is collapsed, which we thought
indestructible, to protect our ships and ourselves. And the men
fight right up by the ships, and cannot make an end of it.
Battle-lines have dissolved, and Achaeans bob amid bodies
helter-skelter in one ill-seeming confusion, and the noise
rises to heaven, yet all it as it is. We now must think
of a next step, before we’re stepped on. Let us pause here and think,
for wounded men such as yourselves should not be in battle.”

And king of men Agamemnon answered him :

“The fighting has come to the ships, and we are unable
to hold them back. The Wall has come to nothing, nor was the trench
any use, though both drained us of much energy. So it is.
Why Zeus would take perverse pleasure in seeing the Argives
die far from Argos, in this way, I cannot say. I always knew it,

even when at the first Zeus gave us strength; and now he ties up our hands, and at the same time exalts the Trojans. Hard to believe. But so it is. So this is my command, for all to hear, and follow : We draw our ships into the sea, first all those propped at the head; we bring all our black ships into the shining sea, and there let them stay by their stones until nightfall—if the Trojans have had enough of us by then. Better to flee than to be captured, or killed.”

Then with a grim look Odysseus πολύμητις answered him :

“Agamemnon, what the hell are you talking about? You would add to the disgrace of this clean sweep by scampering away, the commander of our army? I wish Zeus would indicate why it was you who was chosen to lord over us and lead us, winding us up all the way from youth to age like a ball of thread you’ll toss into the fire without a second thought, and while you sail away, behind your back every last one of us dies! Do I speak correctly here? You’ll sail away and allow the glorious city of Troy to stand as it does, after our men have suffered for it an evil misery unspeakable? Indeed, speak not another word, commander of the army, unless you want your words to rush from mouth to mouth till everything becomes incomprehensibly horrid. Such words no man should speak : not from anyone who understands at heart what is right; and you, a sceptred king, to whom so many have come to kneel before you as leader, and all the Achaeans besides! Now I understand your heart and mind, I don’t like what I’ve learned. We are not drawing our ships down into the water, we are not allowing the Trojans the satisfaction of that sight. They will not beat

us. Our destruction has not happened yet. So no one here breathe a word of what our commander has just ordered us to do.”

And king of men Agamemnon answered him :

“Odysseus, you’ve come down to it with strong words; but I think you have misunderstood me. I am in no way, shape or form recommending the men to drag their ships down the sand, and sail away through the sea against their will, and return to their homes. Now I stand and await a better plan, delivered from any man, young or old. I will listen well, and gladly.”

So Diomedes spoke :

“That man you look for stands with us,” he said, “if you’re willing to listen, each of you—because that man is me. I am youngest in years among you. However, you all know my lineage, that I come from people noble and wealthy and courageous; and my father Adrastus was celebrated among Argives as excellent with the spear. You must know all this I say, as all of it is true; so please do not ignore me because you erroneously believe me a child. My noble blood has not one drop of cowardice in it, nor evil; so hear me speak, and do not reject me outright before you hear my counsel; because I may very well speak of our salvation.”

So spoke Diomedes, and all the men there listened, so he continued, saying :

“So come! Wounded though we are, like it or not we’re going down to the battle, though we’ll stand to one side of the aerial

bombardment flying every which way, so we'll add no further hurt to ourselves. And we will use our Reason to look upon the field, and reorganize our men into an ordered force that we all know cannot lose this war. Discipline is all we require, and the return of our fighting spirit, and strength; then victory is ours. Now, most honest warriors, is the time to use not this natural strength of ours, but our natural Reason, to take this war. We must strategize our way to the win."

Thus spoke youthful, noble Diomedes, and all the men there heard and obeyed.

So all these leaders of the Argive forces—Agamemnon and Odysseus and Nestor—prepared themselves to depart, and the first two warriors ensured their wounds were well-bandaged, in case they must enter combat like it or not; and army commander Agamemnon led the way forward.

And straying into their path, so to speak, was Earth-rattling Poseidon, still skulking among the Achaeans, and he came in shape and voice of some random old man no one recognized, yet, considering how odd events have been up to now, they listened as he spoke out to them, saying :

"Son of Atreus, and all you heroes, it is a terrible thing to think Achilles just now exults over our trouble, as he watches our army slaughtered in panicked confusion; he has neither heart nor mind; not the least of either virtue. May the stern gods punish him evermore for his ignorance.

But hear this : I feel it in my bones that the Olympians

have no lasting distaste for you and all the Achaeans,
 though for a time they allowed this travail by the ships.
 Good Diomedes you believe, and now you must believe me,
 too : apply your strategic mind rightly, and all the Trojans,
 leaders, ministers, foot-soldiers, will raise dust over the plain
 while they flee from your army and your precious ships and tents,
 and return within the walls of their vulnerable city.”

Thus spoke planet-shaking Poseidon, who then released a scream,
 an ear-shattering noise, a colossal call to arms to match
 the immortal power of his majesty, as he withdrew
 in a streak of speed away from the Argives, to disappear
 among the contending army lines. Those who watched him depart
 looked mystified at one another, yet were also heartened
 in spirit, and confidence. Even from a distance the voice
 of Poseidon shook the ears of every warrior on the plain,
 for the volume of his one voice outdid the clamour of thousands
 of men, nine or ten thousand warriors in roaring combat.
 This one wondrous battle-cry, that had no human explanation,
 roused the heart of every Argive soldier, and as Poseidon
 withdrew, he left newfound strength and growing determination
 throughout the entire Achaean army, which now stood ready
 to wage war and fight to the deaths of themselves, or the other.

Now from a high pinnacle of glorious Olympus
 Queen Hera, comfortable on her golden throne,
 gazed down the sky at him, and beheld Poseidon,
 both her brother and brother-in-law, while he
 bustled about the battlefield, and she was pleased
 to see him. Zeus, meanwhile, she saw moping on
 the topmost peak of Ida, where fresh-water springs

gushed down the heights, and the sight of him was hateful.

So the Queen of Heaven began to think how she might deceive the so-called 'all-knowing' mind of Zeus Orderer. So she thought, and determined this plan best : to travel to holy Ida in celestial beauty, the wide-eyed queen, after adorning herself sweetly in beauteous style, perchance to seduce him to lie with her, and embrace her warm body in love; so that thereafter Zeus Orderer might allow sleep to lower the eyelids of his guileful mind, allowing her to exercise more treachery on behalf of the Trojans. She retreated to her inner chamber, a gorgeous place built by her beloved son Hephaestus, who had fitted well-fastened doors to the door-posts with a secret bolt that she alone had knowledge of, so that no other god might enter. Now she entered the chamber and closed the shining doors. Now she was all alone. First she washed her charming body in ambrosia, so that all her clear skin shone desirously, then anointed herself all over with oils rich and soft, and of the gentlest scent; if poured out in profusion there in Zeus' bronze palace this lightest fragrance would fill earth and sky entire. Thus her ravishing body glistened with oils, and she combed the long stream of her hair; then her hands finely plaited the brilliant length into involved tresses, that crowned her immortal face. And round her body she wore a pleasing robe, a wonderfully worked garment from the hands of Athena, who had sewn on it many extraordinary embroideries.

Hera fastened it at the breast with gold brooches;
 and she pinned a cluster of three pearls to each ear,
 and the sight was very graceful. The heavenly goddess
 then lowered the lightest linen over it all,
 a lovely veil, freshly made, and dappled with
 tiny sparkles here and there brighter than the sun.
 Then she slipped her feet into her comfortable
 sandals. So when she was immaculately arranged,
 her voluptuous body a splendour, she summoned
 Aphrodite, and apart from all the others
 these two goddesses spoke.

“Ah, most luxurious of goddesses,” Queen Hera
 said. “How lovely you are! Will you hear my purpose
 just now, or will you refuse me, because it angers
 you that I support the beastly Trojans?”

Zeus’ daughter Aphrodite then answered her stepmother :

“Our splendid Queen Hera, daughter of Time,
 speak your mind. If it is able to be done,
 and I am able to do, then I shall help you.”

And tricky-minded Hera answered her :

“Endow me with love and desire, the power you possess—
 the very sight of it tames all Immortal and mortal men.

For I plan to go over the bountiful earth
 to its limit, to all-embracing Oceanus,
 whose flowing stream brings gods to birth. There I’ll see my

stepmother, Tethys. (They took me in for a time,
 and tended to me kindly in their halls, long ago,
 before Zeus thunderer forced my father Cronos
 down below the earth and monotonous sea forever;
 and my great mother Rhea, who knew Cronos loved
 to eat his children, hid me away there. Finally
 I married his son and destroyer, and my brother besides.)
 As for Tethys and Oceanus, the two are separated
 in quarrel, and neither will undo their dispute.
 It goes on and on, and their marriage-bed grows cold,
 and is not impressed with their embraces, for rage
 in their heart is what they choose over love.
 But if I can win them over with words to lie united
 on the marriage-bed as a balanced weighing scale,
 and join them in love, I think afterward they will
 forever bless me with beloved gratitude."

And laughter-loving Aphrodite answered :

"I have no cause to refuse, nor wish to, as your words
 make me smile with happiness."

And as Aphrodite spoke she loosened from around her neck
 a golden, gemmed charm burning with rainbow sparkles;
 it slipped from between her breasts into her hand, and she held there
 love, and desire, and intimacy; endless seductions
 that subdue even the wisest of minds. This power
 she now laid in Hera's hand, and spoke to her, saying :

"Wear this charm, Hera, between your breasts, and
 you won't come back disappointed with me."

Thus spoke Aphrodite, and the wide-eyed queen smiled,
and as she smiled she fastened the charm around her neck.

Aphrodite then retired to her own luxurious space,
the daughter of Zeus; while Hera left the peak of Olympus
and stepped over the classical peninsula, over Pieria
and charming Emathia, over the snowy Thracian
mountains, and her feet never touched ground; and over
Athos she stepped over the wavy deep, and came to Lemnos,
the city of good king Thoas. There, Sleep was wont to come,
for rest of his own, the brother of Death. The city had temples
devoted to Hypnos, god of Sleep, fragrant with opium,
and dark, as Tartarus under Hades is dark. They met warmly,
hand to hand, and the queen spoke to him, saying :

“You, Sleep, who know of the long way of death,
if you have ever heard me, hear me now, and if you obey,
you will have my thanks all my days. Bring down Zeus’ eyes in sleep,
lower those shining stars, just so long as I lie beside him
in love. For this gift, o Sleep, I shall give you a great work
of Hephaestus, master of hand-art : an imperishable
throne, shining golden always, to rest your strong arms
on exquisite elegance—and with a footstool
for the feet, standing free, to settle yourself in comfort,
while enjoying the feast and the wine.”

Then dark Sleep answered her :

“Hera, eternally honoured queen, daughter of Time,
any other of the Immortals I would lull to long rest

without another thought; even all the streams flowing
out of Oceanus along their many river-beds,
and still all that water. That is to say, o queen of all time,
I would lull to sleep anyone you ask, unless that someone
was Zeus. Any nearer than this to him I will not go,
unless he commands it, or requests my company.
Most honoured Hera, you may remember a request
asked of me, that brought me troublesome drawback?
The day high-daring Heracles, Zeus' son, a generation
ago, sailed away on the sea from Ilium, having left
Troy a smoking ruin. On that day I put Zeus to bed,
I quieted the mind and thought of Zeus Orderer for your
purposes, which, right worthy goddess, you may remember,
were far from appealing in the end. You brought great pain
to that great hero, mighty Heracles, god and man both
in one colossal body. You work your evil like so many balls
in the air. While I'm subduing Zeus, you're rousing winds;
you roused and excited a storm that was not only troublesome
but cruel. (Did you promise Aeolus a throne for that favour?)
Your winds wrinkled the face of the deep, and woke a rage
that tossed hero Heracles to and fro until he came to Island
Kos, far from his friends. Most noble queen, did you think Zeus
would not hear of this when he awoke? He did, and raged
more violently than that storm, and rattled the space
of the gods. Worse, most prominent among his enemies
just then was me. And he searched me out, and demanded
my presence, and readied to toss me out of his sight forever.

But I was no more to be seen in air or in heaven,
for Night, Night who tames all gods eventually,
kept me safe. I, the slow-moving, had to rush to her

in my escape, and appealed to her kindness.

Then Zeus, for all his rage, held his hand back from me,
for he preferred to do no disfavour to All-Encompassing
Night. And now again you come to me to request
a kindness which is awkward and impracticable,
and will not be done."

And the wide-eyed Queen Hera answered him, saying :

"Sleep, why do you keep such vile thoughts in your mind?
Come now! Zeus, all thunder, will offer as much encouragement
to the Trojans as he supported his own heroic son.
But if you help me I will arrange for you a marriage
with one of the Graces. Loveliest Pasithea shall be
your wife, who knows of all pleasures and amusements,
and whom you have loved from afar for ages beyond recall."

Thus spoke Hera, and Sleep heard, and paused; contemplating
wondrous delights, there in the dark of the tall firs
shading his Lemnian sanctuary. Then he spoke :

"Swear to me," he said, "an unbreakable promise.
Swear now on the black waters of the river Styx.
With one hand touch the earth; the other touch the sea;
and our witnesses shall be all of these powers,
even the fallen gods down below with Cronos dethroned;
and promise me one of the beauteous Graces,
Pasithea indeed, she whom I've wished for my whole life through."

So spoke Sleep, and Hera the slender-armed goddess heard him.
She took her solemn oath at his request, pronouncing the names

of all the gods lost in the abyss of Tartarus, those known to man as the Titans. And when she had made her oath in due and solemn form, the pair left Island Lemnos and the city of Imbros, moving through space inconspicuous as light or air moves; and voyaged the open-ended ways to Ida, mountain rich in fresh springs, sacred to men and gods, kind mother to the wild beasts that prey upon her body. They came out of the sea-salt air at Cape Lekton in the west, and as they walked the firm earth their footsteps made the forests shake, even the slender fir trees all along the summits. Zeus watched Sleep hover up a silver fir that grew to the highest air breathable to man and perch there, wrapped up in leaves on a branch, resembling the clear-piping nocturnal mountain bird gods knew as Chalcis, and men by the name of Cymindis.

Hera, meanwhile, swift-rushing, arrived at highest Gargarus, Ida's loftiest peak. And Zeus Cloud-Gatherer saw her, and his heart swelled with love. As if seeing her for the first time; that time they went together in love and roamed upon the bed, all unseen by their beloved parents.

And Zeus was near, and spoke to her :

"Hera, why so hot to come down from Olympus?
Your horses at not at hand here, nor your chariot,
for you to mount."

Then tricky-minded Hera answered him :

"I'm heading to the limit of the bountiful earth, to see
Oceanus and stepmother Tethys. They tended to me

kindly in their halls, long ago. I'm off to end a confused
 and continuing feud between them. For too long a time now
 they've kept apart from one another, ignoring the marriage
 bed, and love, ever since acrimony fell into their hearts.
 And my horses stand at the foot of mountain Ida. From the springs
 here they'll cross both the firm and the flowing.
 In fact I am here to see you, so you won't think me going
 secretly to deep-flowing Oceanus, and get angry."

And Zeus answered her :

"Hera, go hither and thither to wherever hereafter.
 Just now let us lie in love and enjoy each other's pleasure.
 Never before have I felt this way for any goddess or woman;
 my heart inside rushes out in a flood and overpowers me.
 Not when I seized Ixion's wife, who birthed Peirithous, god-
 like in wisdom. Not when I took Acmsius' daughter
 the beautiful-ankled Danaë, who birthed Perseus, god-
 like in most all ways. Not even when I had the widely-known
 daughters of Phoenix, who birthed Minos and godly Rhadamanthus.
 Not with Semele, who birthed Dionysius. (Semele's hair
 was inexpressible.) Not with Alcmene in Thebe, who birthed
 Heracles, a most strong-spirited son! Not with Demeter,
 ἄνασσα Demeter, queen and lady. And not with Leto.
 And not even with you, that first time, did I have this desire
 to have you. Share now in pleasure sweet to the taste."

And Hera his wife answered him :

“Most powerful Orderer of Time, Zeus, how you speak!
 If you had your way just here atop the peak of Ida,
 everyone everywhere will see us! And how would it be
 for me if one god brought all the others round to watch?
 I would never rise from that bed again; I would be too
 embarrassed. But—if you would have your way with me,
 and your heart is as you say it is, then think of that inner
 chamber your beloved son Hephaestus chiselled in the rock
 somewhere round here : its solid doors are well-fitted.
 Let us go there to lie down, since your pleasure is what you want.”

And Zeus answered her :

“Hera, fear no god, nor man. I shall wrap round us
 clouds fringed in gold; not even Helios himself,
 sharpest-sighted light itself, will see through to us.”

And at that, the son of Time took his wife into his arms,
 and they sank onto the earth, bedded up by fresh-budding grass,
 and the dewy lotus drops, and the crocus, and the thick-falling
 hyacinth : all this rising delicately into the light,
 a suspensory surface for the pair : and the cloud hung suspended
 in the air like a cloak for the sky, while they lay together :
 and, glistening, dripped dew.

So the Father slept on highest Gargarus, at the farthest
 point reached into the sky, in love-filled sleep subdued,
 his arms round his wife. But the God of Sleep was wide-awake
 and rushing to the Argives’ precious ships, to bring news
 to Earth-Moving Land-Shaking Poseidon. So he said to him :

“Poseidon, to stay one step ahead here you must raise up
 the Argives, resurrect their power. Then they’ll win great glory,
 if only for a little while, the length of a momentary
 drowse—for Zeus sleeps! I have buried him myself in a deep sleep,
 after Hera lured him into bed with her feminine deceits.
 Who can say what next shall fall upon the Argives, with Hera
 goddess about to weave more of her elaborate trickiness?”

Thus spoke Sleep, who retired from sight, yet remained among men.
 Poseidon, however, standing where he was among the multitude,
 the many communities united as the Achaean people,
 was compelled to bring them together as a proper fighting
 force again; and so he cried out, drawing all eyes upon him,
 as he said :

“Achaean! So you’re willing to hand over the victory
 to Priam’s Hector? And watch him take our ships
 and burn them to ash? And let our deaths win him glory?
 That is not as it shall be! For out there among our ships
 is Achilles, whose rage for destruction is incomparable!
 So just now bear down, and hold each other up, and get ourselves
 over them! Come now! Now is the time to obey my words,
 every last word I say! I speak to all men who want to fight!
 Give all those men the heaviest shields to lift, and put them
 in the front! And everyone settle your helmets properly!
 —their blaze blinds the enemy! Some of you start collecting
 the long spears for us to use! For any man too weak to fight,
 give him the scanty shields, and they must hand over the greater
 ones, to the men willing to get behind them and stand in battle!
 Hector will soon fall! I’m sure of it! Come now! I lead the way!”

So he spoke, and they readily heard and obeyed.

Now the kings, too, though wounded, took their positions
in the battle array. The warriors saw Diomedes,
Odysseus, and son of Atreus Agamemnon enter;
and they went through the men with words of encouragement for each,
overseeing exchange of arms and armour, and the shoring
up of all things. Then when each man stood inside his tidied bronze,
flashing this way and that now and then as he moved here and there,
the Achaean army stepped forward, and Poseidon Earth-Rattler
led the way, lifting high in his extended hand a sword fearsome
with razor's edge and long as lightning, and flashing in his bold
grip it promised misery to any warrior who came near,
but, as it happened, terror kept everyone away from him.

Meanwhile, across the way, shining here, now there,
among the vast Trojan forces, was δῖος Hector, arranging
the men exactly, just as the Achaeans had done.
Now, discord in combat was stretching to its most terrible
strain, as dark-haired Poseidon faced Hector's shining army.

Now, the shallow sea-wave rushing up onto the shoreside sand
makes a shimmering sound as it shirs in from the deep. And out
in the deep salt sea a wave is scooped up high by the North Wind
with a great hiss. And when fire blazes through mountain forests,
all the air crackles. And when the wind shrieks loudest in its fury,
raving up among the highest-growing oak trees—
still that sound, like the others, were small compared to the roar
that arose when the two armies rushed forward, face to face,
and fell into combat.

Ajax, bare of breastplate behind his shield, trusting in its heavy,
 many-layered defence, which he kept raised before him, now faced
 Hector, leader of the Trojan army, who lifted a death-tipped
 spear, and cast it straight on before him, and it followed the direction
 of its aim, and reached its mark : Ajax. But the spear-point hit him
 in the chest where two leather straps overlapped (one from sword, one
 from shield) so the spear failed to pierce through to his flesh.
 But for that one moment Ajax was open to death, for he'd dropped
 his shield as Hector had lifted his spear, in order to raise
 high up over his head with both arms a mighty boulder,
 one of the many used to prop up the precious ships by the sea;
 and just as Hector drew back groaning at his failed attempt,
 Telamonian Ajax's boulder soared in and crashed against
 his bashed-up bronze shield and armour. And Hector whirled round
 like a spinning top for a turn, and his shield rim was mangled,
 and his breath struggled out of a wounded throat : and just as Zeus
 Father tears up root and branch an old oak tree out of the earth,
 then lets it topple through the sulphur fumes : just so, Hector fell
 to earth, and entered a cloud of dust. His slender second spear,
 the λόγχη, dropped from his grip when his bronze helmet hit the dirt
 with a clang, and all round him his much-indented bronze rattled.
 Then, as he lay outstretched, his sight began to narrow, and darken,
 as he looked into the dust. And as he lay there he heard the sounds
 of the warriors fighting over his body, Polydamas
 and Aeneas and Agenor and Sarpedon and Glaucus,
 wrestling with the Achaeans, with cries and shouts, and growling
 and snarls; and they beat back the enemy; and surrounded him,
 a wall of warriors with raised round shields. After that, men ran in,
 and each took hold of a limb, and they carried him off and away
 from the battlefield, and brought him to his horses standing
 waiting for him at the back of the combat and war, with their driver

standing with them. These took him back toward the city; and he moaned and sighed as he sat doubled-up in the chariot-box.

But when his driver and friends came to the river Scamander, its fresh water rushing through the desolated plain from one side to the other, about halfway along, the river that Zeus Immortal brought into being, there everyone stopped. They thought it best to try to revive Hector with the running water, so lifted him out of the chariot-box; but his legs gave way under him and he sank to his knees, and choked out dark blood. His eyes lit up and, for a moment, sharpened, then again narrowed and darkened, as his spirit struggled to revive from the overwhelming blow.

And the Argives, seeing Hector withdrawn from the battlefield, swarmed with renewed force over the Trojans. The fast-moving Ajax, Oïleus' son, ducked under a spear thrust from Satnius, then leaped in to pierce his neck with a dagger, face to face, and he opened up the veins there, and the blood gushing sprayed Ajax up and down : just as a Naiad Nymph had once come out of the river Sat-ni-oe-is-i-os, to lie, dripping wet, with herdsman Enops, to then give birth to hapless Satnius. But amid all the blood of the battlefield this Satnius died unseen. Son of Oïleus sprang away then, seeking fresh terrors to create. Just now the Argive mind thought solely of war, until every last warrior reached an ecstasy for blood. From out of blood all these men came into the world; now these men struggled back into blood. Limbs and heads were hacked off as they came into sight. Trojan Polydamas, an able marksman, royal Panthous' son, cast his spear at Prothoënor : and the heartless point entered his shoulder and out : so the man fell to earth with the spear fixed in his body.

And Polydamas came close enough to kick dirt into
the fallen Argive's face; then, when he had done this,
he unsheathed his sword to take the left leg from the fallen man;
then shouted out for all to hear :

"Once more the son of fine Panthous hits his mark!
He's given up his spear as a walking stick to an Argive,
who will now need it on his way down to Hades!"

And by the time he had ceased this exultation,
the fast-moving Ajax had cut through a body of Trojan
warriors : and while Polydamas himself avoided
black fate by leaping backwards even as he spoke,
his men round him dropped to the dirt in a mess of severed legs.
Ajax then opened the many-organed body of Archelochus,
then severed his head so cleanly it fell to earth before the body did.
Fast-moving Ajax then shouted after royal Polydamas :

"Will all those legless ones balance out the scales neatly enough
for you, Polydamas? All those stumps, for one Prothoënor?
And this one—such a fine-featured head! I know him
as one of grand Antenor's brothers! He resembles him handsomely."

Then Acamas, brother of the fallen Archelochus,
bestrode the headless body, and lashed out
with his spear and stabbed Promachus, a warrior
who'd come with the fifty ships from Boeotia.
And so Acamas shouted :

"You miserable babbling wild Argive beasts!
Beware of what you show us! We will give as good

as we get! As we see done to us, we too shall do
 to you! See how with one touch of my hand
 I put Promachus into the darkest sleep! Mark
 how quick came vengeance for my brother!
 Every man here should have someone to avenge him
 as fast!”

Thus spoke Trojan Acamas, and his boastful words
 incensed the Achaeans, and Peneleos especially
 so, an ἄρχων of Boeotia. Battle-minded
 Peneleos charged noble Acamas, who ducked
 out of sight, leaving Ilioneus to take in-
 to his body Peneleos’ lethal-tipped spear.
 Ilioneus was the son of wealthy Phorbas,
 whom Hermes, Guardian of Flocks, loved and favoured;
 and Ilioneus was his mother’s only child;
 yet Ilioneus received a spear-point
 at the base of his nose that popped out an eyeball,
 roots and all, and the spear-shaft kept on and drove through
 the nape of his neck; and he sank like a bird to the earth,
 spreading out his arms, and his hands touched the soil.
 Peneleos then drew his sharp sword and severed the head.
 Then he lifted up his arm high, for all to see,
 and in his hand he held the head of Ilioneus
 like a poppy, because the bronze spear-point
 still stuck in the broken skull, like a stem of a flower;
 and the head of Ilioneus, still in its helmet,
 was seen by all the Trojans, who heard Peneleos speak out :

“Mention me, Trojans, to the parents of the illustrious
 Ilioneus, while they’re weeping and wailing in their halls!

And tell them their son died for Promachus, whose wife
will have no cause for joy when our ships return from Troy!”

So shouted Peneleos, who roused the Argives’ fury;
and the Trojan soldiers glanced around quickly,
looking for a quick exit to safety.

End of
Book XIV

Book XV

The Achaean army pushed the Trojans back beyond the line of palisading spikes, then the trench; and many Trojans panicked, and in their wild flight were brought down to earth by the death-skilled hands of the Danaans. They were retreated now to their array of chariots, where they stood, green with terror, looking on as the Achaeans gained order and power increasingly as they came.

Zeus, meanwhile, opened his eyes atop the peaks of Ida, there beside Hera in their golden-fringed cloud-cover. Then at once he darted out in all directions from that cloud, which melted like breath into the wind, while he watched Trojans and Achaeans in combat on the Scamander plain. Confusion had come to the Trojans in the wake of Zeus' sleep; the Argives were pressing them hard now at the back, keeping the enemy away from the precious ships. And Zeus saw brother Poseidon down there among them, strutting. And he saw Hector, δῖος Hector, the Trojan commander, lying dazed on the plain by the rushing river, struggling to take a breath, and choking out blood, and darkening the earth with it. (All now knew once and forever that no inconsiderable Achaean had struck Hector senseless.) So Zeus took everything in, then turned with a terrifying look at his wife, and spoke out :

"Hera! Your trickery and evil arts have brought Hector out of the fight! And put his entire army to flight! All this evil weaving of yours, your knitting of trouble and pain into things, now complete for the moment, is yours to wear now. Be the first to share in the rout down below! I shall whip you.

Remember when I hung you feet-first in the air, suspended
 from two meteoric stones, and with your wrists bound
 in golden bonds unbreakable, you felt the touch of my
 thunderbolts? You dangled in the clouds of the open air,
 and all the gods raged in ever-expanding Olympus.

But they were not able to free you, were they?

They were not even able to come near you.

Whomever I saw in the attempt, I took and tossed from
 the starry threshold, and watched that feeble one
 fall to earth with defeated spirit. What sticks in my mind
 is your conspiracy to destroy godlike Heracles,
 using your beguilements to lure the North Wind to blow
 the sea senseless after he overcame the Amazons.

You sent my son over the blue blank to Island Kos,
 where the people there almost tore the weakened Heracles
 to pieces. Of course that never would have come to be.

I remember I lifted him up in my hands and placed him
 gently down back in Argos, where the most beautiful horses
 graze, and there he rested back to indestructability.

I remember all this, but do you? If you did, you would cease
 all your trickery. You came to me from the gods with deceit
 in mind! While I was lying with you, you were lying to me.”

Thus spoke Zeus, and wide-eyed Queen Hera shuddered, as if from cold,
 then answered him with winged words :

“Know now this, Earth and Heaven and the downward-flowing water
 of the Styx (and this is the most solemn and impressive oath
 we fortunate gods can make), I swear, on my own monumental
 husband, and on our marriage-bed, symbol of our wedded love
 (on which I would not lightly swear a solemn oath),

that I have absolutely nothing to do with Lord Poseidon shaking the earth down there, bringing harm or hurt to whomever he may. His own heart motivates and commands him in this. He saw the Achaeans worn down by their ships and took pity on them! I would encourage him, however, to follow the Word of the king of the Olympians, and stay out of it.”

So she spoke, and in answer a cold smile hardened Zeus’ face. And then he responded to his wife, saying :

“Truly, Hera, if you answered my thought without comment more often, when sitting at the council of the Immortals, perhaps Poseidon would not now be tiptoeing around down there, but obeying me. If, indeed, you would ‘encourage’ him in thought, do so. Go down there now and send all the gods out of the battle (except for sweet Iris, who can remain with the Achaeans), and particularly command Poseidon to cease his meddling and submerge back into his depths. Do you want to see fighting that will make all these warriors forget their former fighting? Hera, is that what you want? So it shall be, as my wife would have it. We shall have Apollo ‘encourage’ δῖος Hector to fight with as much strength and spirit and madness as you wish. With my slightest of thoughts I will cure him, there by the river, of all his injuries, and return him to strength, and drive yet again the Achaeans backward to the sterns of their precious ships, inspiring panic, and desperation, and let-up. And the entire Achaean army will be caught between their own fallen wall and precious ships, and feel the press of it. There, where Achilles sits—who blithely lets his army collapse around him.

After, we shall retrace our steps back to the well-trodden foot
of the city gate, when the Argives awake, and push the Trojans
back across the Scamander Plain. So back and forth these armies
shall go as sun follows moon, and hand follows thought,
until the sons of the Achaeans school Troy in the counsels
of Athena. That will be when Achilles lets out his rage.
Until then, let all be aimless and dire at once, as men
struggle to defend something already lost, and won.”

Thus spoke Everything, and Hera went on her way.

And as a thought in the mortal mind moves swiftly,
now here, now gone, now grown, just as a traveller
over distant lands comes excited inside as he thinks,
with the wisdom of experience, ‘shall I go this way,
or that?’, and his choices of routes are many :

with just such eagerness Queen Hera sped up to Olympus,
and encountered there the assembly of gods, the faces
of the Immortals; and all of them were glad to see her.

But Hera let the others be, and came to Themis, near to
her austere presence, and lightly lifted the cup offered her;

and Hera spoke :

“Does Ἄρως yet know that Ascalaphus, whom he
calls his own son, fathered with the princess Astyoche,
has lost his life in that horrible battle?”

And Ἄρης of rage, of primal brutalizing rage,
 came up close to the fight; but goddess Athena
 stood before him, and spoke :

“Hera said she has just come from Olympian Zeus.
 What if Zeus himself comes to *you*, and to all of us,
 each in turn, innocent and guilty alike?
 (It makes no difference to him.) So let it go,
 the sad death of your mortal son. It’s what
 humans are. Lineages come, then die away.”

So Ἄρης left the battle; and a rainbow flared
 overhead, but not for Ἄρης : it was Iris who had come,
 together with Apollo, to the peak of holy Ida;
 for Hera, following Zeus’ command, had sent them there.

Zeus Father smiled to see all of her delicate colours
 before him; and was not unhappy with her, for she had come
 at once. So he spoke mildly, and requested of her
 to deliver a message to Poseidon in the field;
 and so she left at once;

and swiftly as snowflakes that the North Wind sends forward,
 Iris whispered through the air, and descended from heaven,
 and drew close to Earth-shaker, and spoke :

“A message to you from Zeus Orderer. He suggests you leave
 the battlefield. He invites you up to Olympus, or to go
 swim in the sea : whichever is your pleasure. He says if you
 hold out here he will set himself against you.—which should concern
 you, considering he’s stronger and wiser, and the older

brother. Yet you do not observe him as the others do,
who look on with terror.”

And Poseidon answered her :

“ὦ πόποι ! Goddess Iris, what a weight of words you deliver!
I tremble—as does anyone who comes to face his fate, feeling
in heart and mind a rage against everything! I was granted,
when the lots were shaken and cast, a third of this world, the sea;
while Hades went below and took the dead into his arms,
and Zeus took the sky; so why must I bow before Zeus?”

So Poseidon considered for a moment, then continued :

“However,” he said, “right now I shall go, as I have other
matters at hand just as vital as this. Goodbye, sweet Iris.”

Then amid the gathering clouds Zeus looked upon Apollo,
his mighty son native to the rocks and forests of Delos,
the Island of Far-Reaching Sight, as they used to say of it;
and he said to him :

“My dear son! Go to the bronze-armoured Hector
and revive him back to full strength.—That might
inspire the Achaeans to run for their ships
and sail through the narrow Hellespont
and away! At their most desperate, just then
I will allow them to breathe easier again.”

Thus spoke Zeus, and his son heard and obeyed.

Apollo swooped down Ida as a falcon streaks down over hills, looking for timid doves to kill, as they used to over the rocky soil and scattered highlands of his birthplace.

And there on the stony Scamander Plain δῖος Hector lay breathing out his life, hearing the rushing waters of River Scamander by him, and also the clear tones of a lyre's strings, resonating under the fingertips of a master musician. Hector opened up his eyes, and sat up, and saw a man by the riverbank, leaning casually against one of the trees, and singing lightly of family life; of his mother hanging the lyre on the golden peg in his father's house; of the bustling family table; and the sweet maidens of Delos, Island of Far-Reaching Sight.

And in the midst of his song, Apollo spoke out, saying :

"Priam's son, Hector, why do you linger away from the others? I do not think it's from any trouble that has come to you, that you sit by the riverside, and listen to my clear strings."

So as Apollo sang, δῖος Hector, meanwhile, stood up, and took a clean breath in and out, and felt his spirit expand inside his body back to strength and purpose, power and fight. And all his pain ceased, for Zeus had revived him when Apollo had approached; and his friends rejoiced at Hector's recovery, and at his readiness to re-enter combat.

But Hector, his stable legs restored under him, went over to the man with the lyre, and asked :

“Who of the gods are you, that speaks to me
 in the ways of men, but who works as gods
 do? For I did indeed face trouble, there
 by the sterns of the Achaean ships, where
 Ajax, wondrously strong, lifted up
 a stone no one man should be able to lift,
 and struck me on the chest with it, and sent
 me out of the fight, and barely alive.
 And just now I felt myself entering
 the darkness of the dead place under this
 one; I felt myself leaving my body
 forever. Yet here I am, full of life,
 when but a moment ago I was dead.”

But to all this Apollo only answered :

“I’m a wanderer,” he said, “but you have some place to go.”

And the god launched into air as a falcon breaks into sky,
 and away. And Hector, mighty Trojan commander, abandoned
 there on the plain, looked across the fresh river-stream, and saw
 his vast warrior forces compressed down by the Argive camp,
 at the sea-end of the plain, near their precious ships, and the waves.
 And with every breath he took his rage for war increased in strength.
 And even as a horse who’s just ate his fill in his stall, breaks
 his bonds, and gallops along the plain flat-out, raising head high
 in triumph over his shoulders, with his loose-flowing mane
 a splendour to see, while he runs; and, familiarised to bathing
 in the fresh-flowing river-water, so his fast-galloping legs
 take him to the customary places, to his pastures and haunts;
 so δῖος Hector rode toward the battle, and war.

And among the reinforced lines of Achaean warriors,
 Odysseus and then Idomeneus went together
 to son of Atreus Agamemnon; and the other leaders
 met them too, and assembled by Agamemnon and his men;
 and Odysseus spoke out for all to hear, and said :

“If we believe our eyes, we see someone coming who should not
 be coming. It is Hector. He has somehow eluded
 the Fates and appears a second time. He’s risen from the dead.
 We expected that Ajax had crushed all life left out of him.
 But he comes, and with the chariots of his best men with him.
 It is obvious that Zeus will not hand us victory simply.”

So spoke Odysseus. Then Idomeneus and Ajax
 and Meriones and Meges and quiet Menelaus
 and Agamemnon each and all returned to position.

So the two armies faced one another, with the Argive trench
 between them. There, the Argives had beaten back the Trojan men.
 But just now those same men saw their leader’s glinting helmet
 coming across the plain, and a cheer rose up by the trench.

And Apollo Ἑκάτοξ , he who shoots from afar and hits
 his mark always, hovered over the army of the Trojans
 and their allies, and strengthened them all, as decreed by Zeus,
 as the two armies prepared to fight.

And when Hector and the best of the Trojans returned to the lines,
 and went among them in their shining armour, then the Argives
 across the way watched their enemy gain confidence and force,

while the Trojan leaders, including the miraculous Hector,
called out strong words of encouragement for all his men to hear.

And just as barking dogs and bustling hunters pursue
an antlered deer or wild goat, but the thick-shaded woodland
they crash through opens up onto a wide and rocky spot,
and their prey is gone, and they think, 'So be it, we weren't fated
to catch it.' But then a lion comes along the way, and is
not so eager to be hunted, and the dogs and hunters flee,
and hope simply to live the next few minutes through : such a fear
the Achaeans felt while watching Hector's glinting helmet;
and the fighting spirit of the whole Achaean army sank.

And now the Trojan army pressed forward as one unified
force, led by Hector; and Apollo above them, draped in cloud,
raised the dread sign of Zeus' power, the αἰγίς , complicated
shield of Zeus, that Hephaestus had hammered out as an emblem
of panic and terror. With this omen in hand, radiant
Apollo went along with the advancing Trojan warriors.

Now, while watching the enemy advance, the Argives stood firm,
even when hearing their shrill battle-cry, at which all birds broke
into sky. And then the arrows began to fly in, then the spears.
So the Achaeans raised shields, and stepped forward, and engaged
the Trojan army head-on; and over the Scamander Plain
a bronze rain fell onto both armies steaming up with heated
combat. And man-eating war opened its awful mouth wide,
and many young men in the prime of their lives and strength were killed.
And the far-flung spears flew into both sides of the front, and fixed
many a warrior to the earth, quivering and coughing up blood
while their souls left for the darkness of the underworld forever;

but some spears, having missed their mark, stuck wobbling in the dirt,
 through greedy to push deep into flesh. And men brought down men
 gasping their last; and all were stimulated to bloody rage,
 as the fighting swelled and the sun rose ever-higher, and dust
 filled the air again and stuck to the sweat of the warriors'
 bodies, as havoc and turmoil shook the earth by shining
 Troy. Hector brought down Stichius, a Boeotian leader,
 and Arcesilaus, friend to great-hearted Menestheus.
 And Aeneas stripped Medon and Iasus of their lives.
 (Medon was one of Oïleus' illegitimate sons,
 a brother of Ajax, but lived far from home in Phylace,
 after murdering a cousin of his stepmother, Eriopis,
 whom Oïleus had married. And Iasus was an officer
 of the Athenians, Sphelus' son, son of Bucolus.)
 And Argives Mecisteus and Echius, father and son,
 both fell this day, together on the front lines, the first to wild
 Polydamas and the second to quick-footed Polites.
 And Agenor struck Clonius, who had come up from Boeotia
 to assist the Argive cause, but ended up dead. And Paris
 brought down Deïochus from behind, thrusting his spear
 through his body clean, spine-first, when Deïochus had turned to flee.

The Achaean heroes were falling while Apollo shook
 the dread αἶψά and screamed horridly in their faces, taking
 their strength and courage away; so their spears missed their mark,
 and they fought as terrified as a herd of cattle against
 gathering beasts of prey at night, while Apollo
 allowed the Trojans to prosper, following the will of Zeus.

So the Trojans were stripping the fallen Argives of their arms
 and armour; and the sight was too bleak for their leaders to see it.

So in blind panic the Argives fled from the Trojan onslaught,
rushing over the rubble of their fallen wall to struggle
back into their camp, there on the edge of the plain by the water.

Meanwhile, Hector shouted out for all his men to hear, saying :

“Forward, men, everyone! Let the spoils be! Any warrior
not charging forward will suffer! There’ll be no honourable
death on the battlefield for you, no rightful funeral fire!
I’ll throw your body for the dogs to devour, there in front
of the eyes of the city! Now come on! Forward to the ships!”

And with the full swing of his arm Hector cracked the shining whip
over his horses, and his chariot flew forward; and all his men
came with him, cheering, all the bronze-armoured lines of Trojan
warriors; and the sound of it all was incredible to hear.

As when by the up-rushing waves of the sea a little boy
plays with the beach sand as if with a toy, making this and that,
then crushing it all lightly in play as the waves rush forward :

just like that, Παιῖαν Apollo Healer pushed in the Argives’
mighty ditch with a light tap of his foot, and its high walls
collapsed into a heap of dirt, filling up the wide-dug space
until a causeway came to be; then the Trojans, led by Hector,
sped forward in great numbers to the sterns of the precious ships.

*With just so light a touch, o Παιῖαν Apollo Healer,
you confounded the Argives, and eradicated all
their hard work, with one kick of your toes; and with that light touch
you spread panic.*

And as when a wave of the wide-wayéd sea rises up
 over the side of a sailing ship, when pushed forward
 by the wind which increases the swell of all oncoming waves,
 so the Trojans poured over the Wall and came down to the ships.

And Nestor saw the wave of death coming to rush over him,
 and he sent up a prayer to heaven :

*“Zeus, who makes the wheat flare up in our fields like wildfire
 back in Argos, permit us a safe return, and I will honour
 you with sacrifice as-yet inconceivable. If you would
 do so, bring to mind your promise to us, and show us a sign
 of hope; so that this day the Argives are not wholly destroyed
 by the Trojans.”*

So the Trojans came shrieking down to the ships in a mighty
 inundation of unerring spear and sword, and many
 Achaeans fell to the dust, then went under it forever,
 as the Trojan warriors split the air with sound and fury.

A Thunderclap then shattered the concentration of the men,
 all the warriors on the plain, a tremendous sound, the voice
 only of Zeus Father. The warriors raised their eyes to the sky;
 then looked down and fought on.

Meanwhile, good Patroclus sat in Eurypylus' tent,
 sitting with the wounded warrior and listening to his
 tales of war, while applying healing drugs (φάρμακον)
 to assuage the pain radiating from his thigh. But when they
 heard the thunderbolt, that staggering sound, then good Patroclus

went to the doorway of the tent. He saw the Trojans spilling
 over the Wall and charging at the ships, and so close had the
 Trojans come that some Argives fought them from the decks of their ships
 as if in a battle on the high sea, fending off the enemy
 with long pikes of jointed shafts many times longer than a spear,
 and tipped with the lethal bronze point. And around the precious ships
 the Achaeans fought in hand-to-hand combat, amid a craze
 of incoming chariots and double-pointed Trojan spears.

And good Patroclus was stunned to see these sights before him.
 So he cried out aloud and smacked his forehead with both his hands,
 then he let go a terrible groan of terror;
 and, speaking with a tremble, he said :

“Eurypylus, have an attendant finish the work
 on your wound. I must be off to Achilles, and quick.
 The fight has come down to the ships. Our trench and Wall
 were worthless, and now we face destruction.
 I must persuade Achilles to get up on his feet and act!
 I must get him into combat, if I can! If a friend can’t
 do this, then no-one can. Heaven help me,
 maybe I will inspire him to fight.”

Thus spoke good Patroclus, who then ran off as fast as his feet
 could take him. The Argives, meantime, held firm where they stood, defending
 the ships while the Trojans pressed forward with everything
 they had in them; and neither the one could push back, and repel
 the enemy; nor the other break through to flood the tents and ships :
 but just as a carpenter works in building a sea-faring ship,
 and chalks straight lines casually, and fits wood-planks evenly
 (purely from muscle memory alone in his hands, well-taught

long past by the inspirations of Athena) : just so
 evenly matched now were the two armies in combat and war,
 both fiercely struggling, but neither giving any ground away.

So the two armies wrestled with rageful, death-dealing blows,
 hammering one another; and Hector, followed by his own
 company of warriors, hacked his way forward to a ship,
 finally; for he would not be stopped, as Heaven motivated him;
 so he shouted for warrior Caletor, Clytius' son,
 to bring the flaming torch, whose black smoke he saw rising over
 the heads of the men as Caletor ran through the confusion :
 and then by the side of the curved black ship Hector met Ajax.

Ajax had just thrown his spear, which now passed clean through Caletor's
 chest : so the warrior fell dead to the ground, and the burning
 torch, rolling from his fingers free, some Achaean kicked away.
 Then Hector let out a shocking scream, for his father the king
 had just lost a nephew; and he flung his spear hard at Ajax,
 who knocked it away with his shield; but the bronze spear-tip,
 catching the mid-morning light, broke through the skull of Mastor's
 son Lycophron, one of Ajax's trusted attendants, who lived
 with him (for the man was on the run for murder from sacred
 Cythera); and Ajax saw Lycophron tumble off the stern
 of the ship and drop to the dust, where the body went slack.

Meanwhile Hector shouted to his men :

"Trojans! Push yourself forward into the narrow spot,
 and get to the ships! And save the body of Clytius' son!
 Don't let the Argives strip him off before their assembly!"

This Hector shouted. (By 'narrow spot' he meant the zone of camp between the broken wall and the 'assembly' of tents and ships.)

Then Ajax for his part shouted out to his brother :

"Ah, Teucer! We've lost a friend—the great-hearted son of Mastor, who once gave us great friendliness in his household. Hector has killed Lycophron! Teucer! Where are your arrows, and the bow Apollo gave you?"

So Ajax spoke; so Teucer ran to his brother and knelt down to one knee, then drew an arrow from his quiver and set it on the tightly-tensed bow-string : and then he let his arrows fly. His death-delighting fingers cast them into the cascade of Trojan warriors; and he struck charioteer Cleitus, scion of a noble lineage of warriors and ministers, the son of Peisenor, Panthous' son; but his noble bloodline was as vulnerable as the next man's, and hapless Cleitus was transfixed by Teucer's arrow, while he was blundering with the reins in his hands, worrying the horses while rolling in his chariot after the panicked Achaean army. Bent on bringing satisfaction to the Trojans and Hector, Cleitus had abandoned his position by the battlefield's fringe, where he had parked the chariot while its warrior fought in the tumult. In his zeal Cleitus surpassed his duty, and for his pains he received an arrow in his throat. So he tumbled into the dust while the agitated horses ran on, hauling the rattling, now-empty chariot-box.

Teucer then put δῖος Hector in his sights. He drew an arrow from his quiver and laid it on the string, then drew back and aimed,

ready to end the whole battle altogether then and there :
 all he needed to do was take down Hector. But before he
 got off the shot, his well-twisted bow-string snapped in two, and he
 dropped the bow from his hands while the arrow flew off wildly
 and away. And all this because Zeus, who protected Hector,
 was watching; and he took the glory of victory from Teucer.

Then Teucer groaned, and said to his brother :

“ὦ πόποι ! We’re not just fighting Trojans but gods!
 One just snapped my bow-string, freshly strung this morning!
 Some god has made me useless! Now what do we do?”

So Ajax answered him :

“Brother, you’re far from useless. Abandon your bow and arrows
 and raise up a shield and spear and get into the fight, and batter
 the warriors around you! They may reach the ships, but we’ll make
 the price of it a high one! Come now! Let’s find comfort in combat!”

So he spoke, and Teucer sprinted to his tent to arm himself;
 and when Hector saw Teucer with his broken bow quit the field,
 he shouted out for all his men to hear :

“You Trojans, you Lycians, and all our powerful allies,
 now is the time to be men! Go on and get in their faces
 with fury and muscle! Onward to their ships! *Bring the fire!*
 The gods are with us now—I see them failing the Argives!
 One leader’s bow-string just snapped in two!—an omen for us all!
 Sometimes gods show us their will plainly! This war is ours to win!

All men! Fight side by side at the ships, up close and personal!
 And if you fall by spear or sword and meet your fate and death,
 so die! Fighting to save your country, you'll die a hero's death!
 Fight and die, and save all that's yours—your home, your wife, your children
 —for they'll all be safe, once we obliterate the enemy!”

So spoke Hector, and roused the awesome rage of his warriors.

Then Teucer returned, and took his stand beside mighty Ajax,
 now holding a heavy shield of four thick layers faced with bronze;
 and on his head his shining helmet's dark-coloured horsehair plume
 shuddered fearsomely; and in his hands were two death-bringing spears.

Ajax, meanwhile, was answering Hector with his own loud
 war-call to the Argives, shouting out for all round him to hear :

“Wake up, Argives! This is it! It's surely one way or the other
 now : we all die together, or we conquer them together!
 If we don't push them from the ships we'll need to walk the water
 home! Did you not all see the torch of fire brought here? And hear
 Hector just yell out 'Bring the fire?' Truly it is no dance
 he's inviting them to, but a fight to the death! And that's it!
 Now it's simple : if we're stronger face-to-face we win—so put all
 your strength in your hands! There's nowhere to go but into the fight!
 We either win our lives, or are crushed to death by our worthless ships!”

So spoke Ajax, and roused the fighting spirit of all his men.

So the two armies clashed by the ships, where many worthy men
 lost their lives. Perimedes' son Schedius, a leader
 of the Phocians, set upon Hector and was cut down dead.

Ajax took down Laodamas, leader of their foot-forces,
noble son of Priam's first counsellor Antenor. And Otus
of Cyllene had his life taken by wild Trojan Polydamas.
But a close friend of Otus, even Meges, the destructive
Meges, leader of the strong-hearted Epeians, saw his friend
fall, and sprang at Polydamas, and brought him to the ground,
but Polydamas rolled sidewise out and away from under
Meges, and escaped Meges' sword. Meges then took spear in hand
and thrust at him, but missed again, yet hit Croesmus in the chest,
who had just taken an unlucky step sideways; so Meges
yanked out the spear, and Croesmus hit the dirt dead with a rattle,
and others leapt over to tear the armour from his shoulders.
Meanwhile, brave warrior Dolops charged at Meges : he was
the son of Lampus, Laodemon's son, and well-experienced
in war, the most courageous son of his father : so now he
bashed his sharp spear tremendously hard against Meges' shield,
rushing him from close by and surprising him, and the spear-point
ripped through the shield and onward to Meges' body : but he
was saved by his breast-plate, a well-made convex marvel he wore
whenever he fought, constructed of many plates of metal.
His father Phyleus had long ago brought it from Ephyre,
on the river Seleïs; for a friend there, King Euphetes
himself, had given it to him, so that he might have a fine
defence in war : and now this fine armour had just saved his son.
So Meges, having escaped death, responded in kind : he thrust
his lethal spear at brave Dolops' helmet, but Dolops ducked down,
and Meges sliced off the upright stem where the horsehair crested
from, and the bushy plume, still bright with its red and purple dyes,
fell in the dust at their feet. So while Meges stood his ground and fought,
and expected victory, warlike Menelaus rushed over
to assist his man, and he came up beside Dolops unseen,

and thrust his spear into his back, and out it burst bloody through his chest : and Dolops, wide-eyed, sank to his knees, and tipped forward, and landed hard on his face. Then the two men crouched down to tear the armour off the dead man's body. And Hector saw this outrage, and called to his men, looking around him, and he saw the son of Hicetaon dawdling off on his own. This man, named Melanippus, was happier with his cattle in the pasture back in calm and lovely Perkote, but as he was a first cousin of Hector's, he'd travelled to Troy when the Achaeans appeared in their black ships, and was welcomed in the king's palace as if he were a son of Priam; yet now he dawdled on the sidelines of combat.

And Hector yelled at him full in the face, saying :

"Melanippus! What are you doing? Are you going to watch? Do you not see, or care, that your cousin lies there dead? Surely you're not allowing those two to shame the body of Dolops? Come on, then! You can't kill them from here! Either we destroy them now up close, or they take beloved Troy and kill everybody in it!"

So spoke Hector, and Melanippus followed him into battle.

Ajax, too, persisted in urging war, screaming to the men around him, saying :

"Act like men! Weakness is disgusting, in you or in the man next to you! Fight with courage, and you may live! But the weak die, and win no glory! So be men, and fight, and take victory!"

So screamed Ajax, and his warriors heard him. They eagerly raised shields and defended their precious ships with a wall of bronze; while Zeus continued to rouse the Trojan strength against them.

And elsewhere on the battlefield Menelaus encouraged Antilochus, saying :

“Antilochus! Of all of us you’re the youngest, the fastest; and the bravest in fight! So get in there and take someone’s life!”

So spoke Menelaus, who then ran off to rouse the next man, while Antilochus, filled now with fury, leapt into the fray at the front lines, where the foremost fighters strove to stay alive by killing the man in front of him. So Antilochus cast his shining spear, and the Trojans who saw it scrambled away from its flight, but it wasn’t thrown idly, for it ran through Hicetaon’s son Melanippus as he entered the field of battle, he who was inspired by δῖος Hector to fight. And clutching the gushing wound in his chest he fell to the ground with a rattle of armour, and died. Though his eyes were open, they saw nothing around him. Then Antilochus sprang at him. As a dog leaps on a faun wounded by the hunter, so on you, O hapless Melanippus, came steadfast Antilochus, to tear off your armour. But δῖος Hector crept up unseen in the clash of warriors, and Antilochus, becoming aware of him, fled (steadfast warrior regardless), like a wild beast that has worked a consciously daring deed, such as killing a dog or herdsman by his cattle, and disappears before a posse of men can gather to fight it; just so, son of Nestor Antilochus fled from Hector and the Trojan onslaught, who all laughed at his retreat, and sent after him a shower

of spears and arrows; but Antilochus made it back into the safety of his army of swarming Achaean warriors.

But the Trojans charged toward the ships, cutting through the Achaeans like carnivorous lions enjoying their bloody fill, and in doing this they were obeying, unwittingly, the will of Zeus, who had conferred great strength on them, permitting them deeds of triumph, while together with this he had bewitched the Argives, weakening their force and taking all their glory away—for Zeus would have Hector, Priam's son, win glory, and bring blazing fire to the precious ships, the constant inexhaustible flame, and thereby fulfil sea-goddess Thetis' prayer to Zeus, her arms round his legs :

"Bring honour, Zeus, to my brave son Achilles, who is fated to a early death! Invest the Trojan warriors with strength unmatched by Argive blade or spear or hand—until the army honours my son in the way he deserves!"

And so Zeus Orderer waited to see the gleam of fire catch hold of an Argive ship. At that time, then, once more would the Trojans be pushed back from the ships, and the Argives would again have all the power.

So Zeus, with such thoughts in mind, was motivating Hector, who himself was fanatical to kill anyway, and required (so he believed) so further inspiration to overpower the precious ships; for Hector was consumed by the destructive frenzy of spear-wielding Ἄρης, and raged like a mountain fire ravaging ever-deeper into forest thickets. The hardened warrior foamed at the mouth,

and his two maniac eyes flared like bronze under his dark brows,
and his dog-skin helmet rattled round his temples as he fought
to the death. He was fixed on smashing through the lines of soldiers
guarding the ships, and kept battering them wherever he saw
them in densest formation, brandishing their deadliest arms.
But wild as he was, he couldn't shatter the lines and get through.
For the Achaeans held their place in solid masses like mountain
cliffs, steep and hard, that ever take the crash of the ancient sea
against their faces, and the roaring winds whose pathways they block.
Even so the Achaeans held certain against the Trojans
and stood firm at their spot. Yet Hector, glinting here, now there,
like a whirlwind of fire kept moving and falling upon them;
or like a seawave that curls up under the wind-rushing clouds
and smashes into a ship, obscuring it wholly
in seafoam, and the harrowing wind-blast rattles the sail,
and the hearts of the sailors inundated by saltwater
breathe hard, for they know death just slipped past them by a fingersbreath.
With just such a fear were the hearts of the Achaeans beating
while Hector came at then, like fire, like waves, like a lion,
destructive-minded, coming up on a vast herd of cattle
feeding in a low-lying meadow, while their herdsman, not yet
skilled in fighting beasts of prey, walks with the foremost of the drove,
then with the hindmost, but the lion springs into the middle
and tears a twist-horned bull to gory pieces and devours it,
and all the cattle take panicked flight; even so the Argives
finally stepped back from the bloodthirsty maniac Hector
and his Zeus-ordained strength. Nevertheless, during his charge
Hector killed one man only, Periphetes of Mycenae,
whose father was the same Copeus who had acted as go-
between with messages from King Eurystheus and godly
Heracles. (The tale, men say, is no dignified one : the king

feared to meet Heracles up close, so sent Copreus instead.)

The son however, Periphetes, was a man far superior to the father in all sorts of excellence, such as in speed of fight. In thought, too, he was celebrated as an elite man of Mycenae. But the death of Periphetes would bring Hector the triumph he'd been seeking. For as Periphetes retreated along with the others, he stumbled against the rim of his large, body-covering shield, a defence against spears; his two feet became tangled up and he tumbled to the dirt with a resounding clang of his bronze helmet around his head. And Hector's sharp eyes saw, and he came close, and plunged his spear through his chest, and killed him right by his friends, who, though in terrible grief at the loss of their man, held back : for there was not one of them who was not terrified of δῖος Hector.

But now the Trojans had wholly laboured their way to the ships. They'd breached the outermost line of them, the shapely sea-vessels painted pitch-black, there by the sand beach, ghastly with figureheads; and now the enemy battled inside the order of the Achaean ships and tents. And while the Achaeans fighting at the front had failed, and the Trojans had broken through, now the Argives assembled in close order, inspired by terror and shame, and stood their ground inside their camp, ready to fight to the last; and no longer did they fight in grim and terrifying silence : now they shouted out to one another continuously as they sought to hammer back at the invaders.

And loudest of all the voices heard was that of venerable Nestor, the watcher of the Achaeans, who now exhorted each man with the names of their fathers, saying :

“Friends! Be men now—in your hearts, and in the eyes of all the men next to you! Think of your wife and children, everything that’s yours, whether they’re living or dead! I beg you by all their names to stand by me and fight!”

So he spoke and roused the strength of every man around him.

Then Athena goddess turned her commanding gaze to the fight; and in the eyes of all the Argives the Trojan army shone brighter through the grim mists of distressing war : and though Hector was wildly close up in their sights, they saw many Trojans lingering in the rear, standing away from the field and the fight. Now the Achaean army knew for certain it would beat back the enemy from the precious ships.

Ajax, meantime, enraged that he was fighting by the ships, leapt along from ship deck to ship deck with a tremendous sea-pike in his hand as spear, stretching as long as three men end to end : and no Trojan or Argive had ever seen a sight like that.

Like a horseman well-skilled in fancy riding who couples up four horses, then sets all a-going in a rush along a highway towards a great city, and many watch him, both women and men, as he quickly springs from horse to plain to horse unfalteringly as they gallop in a rush : just so did Ajax leap from deck to sand to deck as he sprang down the line of ships, brandishing his wondrous spear; and his voice shook heaven as he screamed at his men, shouting at them orders, and rousing them to push the enemy out of their camp.

And during all this, like an eagle rushing on geese, or cranes,
or swans feeding by a riverside, so Hector charged forward
through the Argives, ragefully carving his way to a black ship,
for Zeus' hand pushed him forward from the back, and the sight
of him encouraged his warriors to fight there beside him.

So a bitter fight took place by the ships. You would have thought
no man was worn out and weary, from the way each fought, greedy
for victory; and both sides looked in love with terrible war.

So this double-thoughted outlook was the present situation :
the Achaeans (some of them) believed themselves wholly destroyed;
while the Trojans expected to soon set the ships on fire
and slay all the warriors and heroes of the Achaeans.
Thus, the two armies had two different views of the one war.

Now the Achaeans and the Trojans set on one another
by the black ship, the beautifully swift ship, of warrior
Protesilaus, the ship that had brought him over the salt
waves to Troy, but would not return him to his homeland again,
for in his eagerness he had been first to fall in the war.
There, the warriors tore each other apart while breathing into
each others' faces : and no longer did spears or arrows fly,
for now the fight was hand-to-hand, man against man joined by fate;
and their weapons were bitter double-edged battle-axes
and shifty hatchets (from the carpenters' stores) and whatever
came to hand : a sharp sword recovered from the dirt, or a spear-
point, for many weapons, including fine blades with iron hilts,
lay in the dust, after tremendous blows to hands and shoulders,
as the warriors fought and fell; and the earth drank up their blood.

So δῖος Hector carved a gory passage to Protesilaus'
 black ship, the beautifully swift ship that slashes the salt waves,
 and he took hold of the ornamental device carved into
 its curved stern, and under his fingers it felt like victory.

And he called to his men, saying :

“Bring on the fire, and together scream out the battle-cry!
 Now is the moment Zeus brings balance! Now all we’ve suffered shall
 be answered! We’ll vanquish those who came to us against the will
 of the gods and brought us wickedness and misery! Not Zeus
 himself will stop us now!”

So spoke Hector, and his men intensely pounded the Argives.

Meanwhile Ajax gave up his position on one of the ships,
 overwhelmed with knocking away all the incoming missiles :
 and he had a sudden vision of his death, so he stepped back :
 and then he jumped down from the fore-deck, and ran along the length
 of the rowers’ bench, and leaped off the far side of the ship.
 There he stood, catching his breath and watching, with huge spear raised,
 for any Trojan coming with terrible fire to set
 the ships glowing with inexhaustible flame. And he cried out
 fiercely to the Danaans fighting close by him :

“My friends, warriors, heroes! Heirs of Ἄρης ! Remember
 you’re men, and fight with everything you have! Do you expect
 a helper to come from behind us? or a stronger wall to rise
 up and save us? Our only protection now are our own hands!
 We have a plain shadowed over with well-armed Trojans in front
 of us, and the sea at our backs, where our homelands are far off

and can't help us : so there's only one way to go—forward!
In combat what brings you to safety is killing, not kindness!"

This Ajax said as he raised his spear and stalked the enemy.
And any Trojan who brought fire to the ships, in the hope
of winning Hector's gratitude, would receive a wondrous spear
instead : and in close fight by the ships Ajax brought down twelve men.

End of

Bk XV

Book XVI

And so the two armies struggled by Protesilaus' ship, he who was the war's first fallen; so now, by this ship, the war might be surging toward its end. Patroclus, during this, stood in the tent of δῖος Achilles, and the hot tears dropped from his eyes even as a mountain stream runs its gloomy waters off the edge of a high cliff : and he looked violent with fear, trembling and pale and pacing the elegant blankets and rugs; and powerful Achilles couldn't help but feel pity for his friend, and spoke out, saying :

"Patroclus, please reveal the reason for this weepy scene. I see a girl, just an infant, scampering to mother's side, and asking to be taken up into her arms. She pulls at her gown, and slows her steps, and looks through her tears at her, until, finally, the mother takes her up. Like her, Patroclus, the untouched hot tears trickle down your precious face.

So let us both speculate on a reason for such gentle weepiness. Perhaps you have sometime to tell me? Or my men, my Myrmidons?—My invincible warriors who yet sit relaxed and unwearied by their ships? Perhaps you carry news from Phthia that only you've heard? I hear that Menoetius, your father, still lives, and mine, too, Peleus, among my men there, the Myrmidons left behind. It would be very troubling were you to tell me that the one, or the two of them, were dead.

Perhaps you're feeling sorry for the Argives, that they cannot end this war, and are paying dearly for their folly, with death? With endless slaughter? Speak, friend, and don't hold back what's on your mind."

Then with a deep sigh good warrior Patroclus answered him :

“O Achilles, best of all of us, don’t be angry with me.

A disaster has fallen on the Achaeans. All the best
men out there lie wounded with injuries from arrow and spear.

Diomedes was hit and is injured; and Odysseus
as well; and Agamemnon; and I pulled a three-barbed arrow
from the thigh of Eurypylus. Physicians with all their drugs
are busy with them, cleaning up their wounds, to heal them.

But you assist no one. No one receives assistance from you.

Oh, Achilles, may I never feel as you do, and treasure up
and cherish such anger and rage—to aimless purpose, as now!

In time to come will there be no one born who will even hear
of a people known as the Argives, if you don’t turn this rout
around? You must stop our shameful destruction, for when we’re gone
we don’t come back! I see how cruel you are now. You speak of fathers.

Great horseman Peleus is not your father, nor goddess Thetis
your mother, but the old melancholy sea gave birth to you,
and its lofty headlands of bare rock! I know this because I see
how harsh and unfeeling you are. If you’re hoping to shun
that prophecy by sitting still, and bring it to naught somehow,
or if you know something from Zeus straight from the lips of Thetis,
at least let me and the rest of the Myrmidons enter the fight,
so that we may bring some help to the Danaans.”

So spoke Patroclus, who then spoke one word more :

“And I have one more thing to say, an idea that just might work.

Allow me to dress myself in your armour, and hold your weapons
in my hands, so that the Trojans may think me you, and retreat.

Then the exhausted Achaeans can have a breath, powerful
 as they are; for they haven't taken in a breath for hours
 out there in the dust and killing. Moreover the Myrmidons
 and I are fresh to fight, and more than able to beat back
 the weary Trojans from the ships and the tents, and get them
 the hell out of here."

So spoke Patroclus, with the fervour of prayer, but without
 knowing, unwitting as he was, all that this prayer, if heard,
 might fulfil. But just now he saw the face of Achilles, and knew
 he'd stirred the heart in him, in one way or another.

And he didn't wait long for Achilles to make an answer,
 who responded :

"Beautiful Patroclus, you say such things to me?
 I care for no prophecy, nor to hear of it, anymore,
 even if my mother reports the words are from the mouth of Zeus.
 I will not get past what has happened to me. It would dispirit
 any man, heart and soul, to be stripped of what's his, by someone
 who's—at best—his equal, but who happens to hold the sceptre,
 and can rob what he likes, from who he wants, whenever he wishes.
 And dispirit turns to hurt, when it happens before the eyes
 of everyone. The girl that the sons of the Achaeans chose
 for me, as a gift of honour won with my spear, when I wasted
 a city, regardless of its 'well-built' walls : this girl the right
 lordly king Agamemnon has taken from my arms, as if
 I were a nobody from nowhere, with nothing going for him.

All this is as it was. So let it be. I'm done. No man should
 rage in heart and mind and spirit unceasingly. I should think

it's time to silence the wild at heart, now that war has come
with its head-splitting battle-cry and fight, right up to the ships.

Indeed, Patroclus, rest my finest armour on your fine shoulders,
and command my battle-friendly Myrmidons at the forefront,
and fight with the rest of them; since the Trojans have come with their
dust-cloud to surround the ships, and have pushed the others back
against the seawater's edge, even the mighty Achaeans
themselves; while the entire city of Troy sallies forth to
walk all over them with no fear, and why? Because they don't see
my helmet there. Very quickly would they run away from here,
then their corpses would float along the rivers and clog the turns;
but that's not to be. Why? If Agamemnon had been a fine man
to begin with, we never would have come to this, fighting round
our own tents. Well : let them do their best for possession
of the dead bodies. Is Diomedes attacking? Is his spear
thinning the enemy numbers? Is he keeping off destruction?
Or what about the glorious son of Atreus? I don't hear
his voice out there either, from that hateful head of his. I hear
Hector man-killer urging on the Trojans all around me,
yelling ἀλαλητός ; and the Trojans weighing down the plain
add to the shout of victory, as they await the final
vanquishment. Even so, good Patroclus, in struggling to prevent
this vanquishment, please ensure you fall on them with spirit,
or they just may set the ships aflame, and take away
any beloved return.

Listen to me now and I'll tell you all.

Allow me to exalt in highest honour and glory among
the Argives, by bringing back that one-of-a-kind girl. Return
her to this tent, and put her back into my arms. And I'll take

a splendid spread of gifts of honour put before me as well,
 as recompense above and beyond, to balance the matter.
 But first you have to drive them away from the ships.
 After that, if the loud, barren thunderer, Hera's husband,
 indeed grants you the glory of victory, please return to me.
 And don't be away from me for long; don't get comfortable
 in the fight. It would deprive me of what honour I have left,
 in the eyes of the army—while it exists. Don't kill yourself
 a pathway to the city and Troy and exalt in the win,
 for then you might come to face the immortal Olympians;
 they enjoy to step in to help, so men and women say;
 and it's well known whom Apollo Ἑκατοχ loves.

So it would be best for you to return belovedly here
 to the tent after you've roused the army, setting them alight
 back to strength. When the ships are safe again, let them fight it out
 together on the eminent plain. For by Zeus and Athena
 and Apollo, my good Patroclus, if the two of us get out
 of here alive, only the two of us, and everyone else,
 Argive and Trojan, is lost—so be it. You and I alone
 will loosen and lower the veil from the body of Troy."

But Ajax, back on the field of combat by Protesilaus'
 ship, his passion for war wearied by the inexplicable
 lapse of his army to crush its adversary finally,
 bounded impatiently away from the ship, leaving it free
 to be eaten by flame. If that issue was to be Zeus'
 will, so be it, for Ajax himself had no care to stand there
 any longer, whatever God had in mind, as the missiles
 incoming, the innumerable spears and arrows, deluged
 him in an endless shower, for the wondrous Trojans seemed

tireless. His bright bronze helmet clanged round his head with every blow from stones and all else without pause, as the Trojans kept up the din in both his ears; and his helmet's cheek-pieces (that is, his face itself) had to tolerate a ceaseless battering; and his shoulders were straining evermore to hold up his shield, the heaviest there was; yet still flew in the spears and arrows and stones; but none could get Ajax to budge, unless he chose.

But so he chose, and moved from the ship; yet the missiles kept coming in, and he was panting as he moved, and sweat gushed down his skin, yet evil upon evil refused to allow him to take in a clean breath, even for a moment, for trouble came unceasingly to Ajax by the precious Argive ships.

Muses, now, direct my voice (if it pleases you), you who blow through the open space, and bring energy, from afar to afar, to inspire (for purposes you do not reveal) : Direct, and tell me, if you will, how fire first fell upon the ships of the Achaeans.

Hector came to Ajax, and sheared clean off the bronze point of his spear, leaving Ajax wielding a pointless ashwood shaft, as the spear-head fell clanging at his feet. There was no question now in excellent Ajax's heart, and in the deepest part of himself he shuddered at the prerogative of the gods : how loud-thundering Zeus had made a mockery of Ajax's command, and was willing to hand the Trojans the victory.

Meanwhile, sarcastic Achilles, standing in his tent's doorway, took in the sight of the ongoing abasement of his army, and immediately was light-hearted no more. Raising his hands,

his ten fingers into one fist interjoined, and pressed in force,
he turned to good Patroclus and spoke out :

“Put your gear on, Patroclus,” he said. “I see that the fire
has come to the ships. Soon one mere gust will take all that is ours.
These words of fucking around are over. Fit me with my armour—now.”

So spoke Achilles. So Patroclus dressed him in the shining
bronze. First he fitted the plates to his legs, from the knees downwards;
the silver ankle-guards, beautifully made, were fastened secure
with the cleverest of clasps to the leg-bronze. Next, Patroclus
put the corselet round Achilles’ chest; and its breast-plate,
richly carved and ornamented, sparkled like starlight, and quick-
footed Achilles would dazzle the eyes of his enemies
with it. Then round his shoulders he hung his silver-studded sword
of cruellest bronze; then the shield, colossal in size, and close-pressed
with innumerable layers of dried hide; and then he set
on his head the shining helmet crested with horsetail plume;
and fearfully, ominously, the horsehair shuddered down from
above. Then, Achilles took into his hands two cold-hearted
spears, each perfectly fitting his grip.

(But his father Peleus’

spear, huge and heavy, and apparently indestructible,
he decided to leave behind in his tent—for now. Peerless
Cheiron, teacher of men, giver of many arts to the young
Achilles way back when, had given his father this ancient
spear on the summit of Mount Pelion, that faces outward
to the eastern regions far and obscure; and, indeed, its shaft
was made from the highest-reaching Pelian ash. Achilles
alone had the know-how to wield this massive weapon, which was

meant to kill not just warriors, but the mightiest heroes.
 This spear he decided to leave behind in the tent—for now.)

During all this, Achilles gave orders to his charioteer
 Automedon, mighty Automedon, who smashes through lines
 of men, the one warrior Achilles stood most confident
 beside in combat. At once Automedon followed command,
 and yoked side-by-side the fast-galloping horses, magical
 Xanthus and Balius. These two flew not just as winds, but were
 themselves winds, conceived by Harpyía, ‘the storm-wind that snatches
 away’, when she lay with West Wind Zephyrus among wild
 horses grazing in a meadow beside Oceanus’ current.
 These breezes, Xanthus and Balius, rippled with the power
 of their cyclonic mother. And a third horse he joined as well,
 by a rope known as the side-trace : even the noble and excellent
 Pegasus, whom Achilles had taken from Eëtion,
 the city in Thebe he flattened to the ground. And Pegasus,
 though open to death as are all living things on earth, yet kept
 pace with the Immortal others.

So, armoured Achilles then went to his Myrmidons, striding
 from tent to tent to deliver command to arm for battle;
 and with their taste for lacerating raw flesh, just as wolves have,
 whose fury is depthless, and unspeakable, so his warriors
 readily fitted themselves in their bronze, eager to paint their
 jaws red with blood, just as the deer lightly laps the transparent
 waters of the fresh mountain-stream with its subtle tongue.
 Like the wolf, like the stag, the Myrmidons were greedy to stuff
 themselves, and continue. So their captains came up to stand round
 superior δῖος Achilles, devoted now to war,
 and to inciting both charioteers and shield-bearing men

to face combat with corresponding appetite for killing.

Fifty was the number of ships that Achilles led to Troy,
 he who was dear to Zeus. And each ship held fifty warriors,
 his friends. Over everyone he had appointed five captains;
 and Achilles himself in his natural superiority
 ruled over those, and over all of them. First, Menesthius,
 whose shining breast-plate changed colour according to position,
 who came from the sweet meadows of River Spercheius, where nymphs
 recline on the grass by the pure waters swelled by Zeus' rains.
 These nymphs contort into shapes that are read like alphabetic
 messages from those who see from afar, and Menesthius,
 indeed, saw this with his own eyes, once, and read there a meaning
 that eventually led him, wondrously, to the side
 of Achilles. The next company's captain was Eudorus,
 who similarly arrived at Achilles by a twisting path.
 One time, mighty Hermes, the immortal messenger, was drawn
 by dancing upon the grass in honour of golden-arrowed
 Artemis, and particularly by sweet Polymede,
 virgin daughter of battle-loving Phylas. So he led her,
 the god, away from the music and up into her bedchamber,
 where he fathered Eudorus, the fastest runner on the plain,
 and a mighty warrior, in secret. But, when Eileithyía
 brought her pangs, and the baby's face into the light of the sun,
 the mighty Echeles, Actor's son, gave Phylas a vast wealth
 of gifts for her hand. Then Echeles lived with Polymede
 in the house of her father, who loved Echeles as a son.
 Thus Eudorus and his godly pedigree of immortal
 power and nobility. The third company of Myrmidons
 had war-loving Peisander as captain, Maemalus' son,
 and a warrior distinguished among all the Myrmidons

(Achilles excepted) with his death-bringing facility
 with the spear. The fourth was led by the venerable Phoenix.
 The fifth by the excellent son of Laerces, Alcimedon.
 When all the Myrmidons stood in order, in five separate groups,
 each with its captain, Achilles delivered his tough command.

“Myrmidons! Now and forever you warriors have no right
 to overlook, conveniently so, the extravagant prattle
 I suffered by the ships, during all the time of my trouble,
 day by insufferable day! And with all your chastising
 of your king, and all your boastful threatenings of the Trojans,
 you emitted words such as these, each one of you warriors :
 ‘O black-hearted son of Peleus! Surely your mother nursed
 you on bitterness and permanent gall!’ This you said of me,
 this you said to me; and you went on to speak : ‘Pitiless man,
 cruel man! Completely unwillingly we’re held back by the ships
 by our commander! If he won’t let us fight, then let’s go home
 on our goddamn precious ships over the goddamn salt water,
 since our leader’s heart and mind, and spirit and soul—are all dead!’
 Well, friends, I’m not dead. And I for one remember all the words
 you babbled when you gathered like gossiping washerwomen!
 To all that now I answer : whatever and who gives a shit.
 Now is the hour of the great fight you’ve been so in love with!
 How kind of the gods to provide you with such a hard battle,
 to test your love for war! So now we fight, and now we kill.
 Let your murderous hearts guide each man right; and whatever else
 you do, do not hold back, but bring your arms down harder, and kill.”

Thus spoke Achilles, enflaming the courage and spirit and fury
 of each man. And their serried lines became evermore razor-
 sharply straight and ordered, when they heard their commander and king.

Just as a man builds the wall of a house, or the side of a ship,
 with close-packed stones in the one, or close-laid planks in the other,
 to nullify the force of the winds, just so closely arranged
 were the Myrmidons, helmet by helmet, shield by shield, man by man.

From the round socket at the apex of each man's helmet streamed
 the colourful plumes of horsehair; and the slim strands of the one
 touched those of the next, as each man moved his head, so close they stood.
 And at the front of the full array of warriors stood good
 Patroclus himself, and Automedon moreover. Both shared
 the same one thought : to fight at the forefront of the Myrmidons.

Meanwhile, Achilles returned to his tent. Off on his own,
 he flung open the lid of a large chest, a gorgeously made
 item that Thetis of the silvery seawaves had ensured
 was stored on his ship before departure for Troy and battle.
 She had packed it well, with many tunics and wind-breaking cloaks
 and other thick and fleecy things, and blankets, and rugs. And as
 Achilles unpacked this chest, he reflected in his mind :

"Zeus, you who know the loneliness
 of the solitary mind,
 as at Dodona, sacred,
 where the earth-born first man lived,
 by the oak tree through which you speak,
 when the branch rustles in the wind
 and the sounds are heard and read.
 The ancient Pelasgians
 grew round that tree; then dispersed,
 populating all of Hellas,

and further.

At that sacred place a people,
 descendants, have kept their home,
 there at wintry Dodona,
 whom men sometimes call the 'Helli'.

Faithfully they interpret
 you; and sleep with unwashed feet
 on bare earth, pleasant for them.

Yet now I too must go forth from here.

I must leave my 'sacred' selfhood
 behind me now. I must walk
 into war."

So by the time Achilles had completed this prayer
 to himself, he had uncovered an exquisitely fashioned
 drinking cup of ancient origin. But no man drank from it,
 neither Achilles nor any other. With this cup prayers
 were made, libations were poured, and to no other gods but Zeus.
 Achilles cleansed this cup with purifying sulphur, then with
 streams of the freshest water; and then he himself washed his hands.
 Then he took the cup to the mixing bowl and drew off a measure
 of the flaming red wine. So the once-sarcastic Achilles
 made prayer, alone with himself, in the centre of his tent,
 with eyes raised up to heaven; and Zeus, who delights in thunder,
 did not fail to hear him as he spoke, saying :

"Zeus, king, Dodonaean, Pelasgian, who is far from me,
 yet here. In times past you've heard my prayers, and gave me honour—
 for without me the army of the Achaeans are failing.
 So hear me now, and fulfil my desire. I shall stand here,

by the ships, and defend the gathering of them; but my friend
 I shall send with my Myrmidons into battle on the plain—
 for surely there can be no other fate but for the Trojans
 to be pushed back—I am sending my friend into war. Give him
 courage, Zeus, together with glory, so Hector will come to know
 even my friend is skilled in the fight, and will come to fear the
 appearance of my invincible hands on the battlefield.

But loud-thunderer Zeus, farthest-seer in all directions,
 once the howling struggle of war has been pushed back from the ships,
 please, God, allow him to return to me unhurt, and with him
 all of his friends who fight beside him, my warriors who wreck
 the finest men as close up as I am to this cup, and to you.”

So Achilles prayed, and Zeus Orderer, here and everywhere, heard him,
 but was not to allow all of Achilles’ prayer to come to be.
 But His will reveals itself only through the passage of time;
 so Achilles yet had great expectation and hope at heart,
 and had no idea that while Zeus would grant the first portion
 of his prayer, God was not to permit Patroclus to return
 from combat unscathed. He was yet to learn the greatest lesson
 of his life; yet stood confident in his tent as he completed
 the libation. So the red wine drops plashed down on the altar.
 Then he carefully returned the wondrous cup back into
 his caring mother’s chest of practical garments and treasures
 of honour, and shut the lid. Achilles turned and went to the door
 of the hut and stepped outside, and regarded the ear-splitting
 tumult of war churning within the distance of an easy
 stone’s throw from his gaze, acute now, and narrow-eyed, as he watched
 the armies of Trojans and Achaeans have at each other.

Now there’s a crossroads in a village where wasps have set their nests

by the wayside, and they bring much trouble to passersby.
 Even so, the rustic children, whose common activity
 is working mischief, irritate the nests, and agitate the wasps,
 who stream out to bring evil in a stinging swarm to any
 one nearby, child or travelling man, who, unluckily,
 may just be happening along the way. Meanwhile, the dark
 cloud of wasps possess the power to defend what's theirs, and do so,
 and sting whomever may be there, bringing panic to many.

So great-hearted Patroclus and the Myrmidons advanced in
 as tight a formation as the swarm of wasps, with one thought shared
 between them all : to leap on the Trojans and kill. So they gushed
 from the ships with a resounding cry and rushed on the enemy.

They rushed on the enemy with good Patroclus' words
 still sounding in their ears :

"Myrmidons, friends of Achilles, you will be what you are, men,
 and get up close and personal with the best fighters they have!
 Let all come to see (we will show them) how Agamemnon,
 king over everyone (with everyone's consent), recognizes,
 finally, his idiocy, and, worse than that, pays for it!
 Let everyone pay, Argive and Trojan, for Agamemnon's
 idiocy! We are Myrmidons : we teach lessons and kill!
 And from then on, the best of the Achaeans will be honoured!"

So with each warrior's spirit swelled to fury, the Myrmidons
 together fell on the Trojans in one dense strike, and around
 the ships arose terrible sounds of cries and shouts and clashing
 of bronze on bronze, sword on helmet, and the shrieks of the dying.

And the terrible brawl of slaughterous Myrmidons was seen
throughout the Trojan army; and once good Patroclus was seen,
himself and his second, both in fighting gear flashing harshly,
the heart began to drain from the battle-lines of Achaeans,
for they imagined Achilles having turned his rage from
his own men to themselves, and was now fighting for the Argives.
So each Trojan soldier knew something new had come to the plain,
something threatening ruin and death, and they looked around them
in a panic, though knowing there was no safety to fly to.

Kind-hearted Patroclus, now war-minded, was first to strike out,
casting his spear, that flared with eye-dazzling sunshine, straight in
to the midst of the battle surging wildly by the ship
of the honoured Protesilaus. The spear ripped through the heart
of Pyraéechmes, annulling the leader of the Peonians,
who'd come from Amydon by the gushing River Axios.
Expert in both chariot and bow, now he lay in the dust,
groaning his last. And at this devastating sight, his people,
even the brave Paeonians, seeing their leader drop,
took a step back, as panic made them quake all over,
for they had believed their leader pre-eminent in combat,
but Patroclus killed him. Patroclus and the invincible
Myrmidons brushed the Trojans aside from the ship,
and ordered water thrown on the blazing fire. The others
heard and obeyed; so the Myrmidons left the half-burnt ship
where it was, charred and smoking, and drove the Trojan army
backward amid the deafening combat.

As when Zeus Supreme, he who agitates the clouds, spreads a dense
stratum of mist over the mountains, and the coastlines, but then
lowers the whole, and the peaks and the rocky headlands rise up

through the dense cloud, and catch the sun, and send it down to brighten the woodland glades; and suddenly all heaven is open to sight, and the wide air stretches back into infinity; so just now the Danaans, having doused the consuming flames, took a breath in deep for the first time that day, yet only for a short time; their respite would be a quick one; and their revival would have to be quicker; for the Trojans, evidently dear to Ἄρης, had not yet ceased their charge, regardless of valiant Patroclus (and the idea of Achilles besides), and still pushed with firm legs headforemost towards the other black ships. So the Achaeans were constrained like never before to withstand their enemy, and dared not relax their slaughterous efforts even a jot. So, hard step by hard step, the Achaeans drove the Trojans back.

And the fight spread out, as the Achaeans came at the Trojans from seemingly everywhere at once, raising a terrifying shout while the two armies interwove in a gory riot. Patroclus, who had only begun to kill, thrust his sharp spear forward just as the Trojan coward Areilycus turned to flee; and the harrowing spear pierced his flesh, then kept on rushing in to him, a sharp clean strike that shattered the bones inside the man, and he fell face-first onto the earth. Then, Menelaus, too, overwhelmed with a lust to destroy, thrust his spear forward, when he saw, for a fleeting instance, the war-loving Thoas reveal a weak spot on his chest, as he repositioned his shield before him; so the spear of Menelaus ripped through that spot, and Thoas slackened and fell, and everything he'd ever loved now left him forever. And Meges, even Meges, destructive strong-hearted Achaean leader, watched, with sly inattention, as Trojan Amphiclus came up to him; then he proved quicker than his enemy, when he lunged with his spear, and tore open

Amphiclus' leg, and its severed artery sprayed blood everywhere. So sneaky Amphiclus snuck straight into Hades. Then the sons of Nestor snatched lives away in the turbulence. One, Antilochus, dispatched of Atymnius without effort, his spear driving into his ribs and wrenching them apart, without Antilochus knowing, as if he would have cared, that his victim was a good friend of Sarpedon, and likewise from far away Lycia, where river Xanthus swirls. But all that was over now for Atymnius, who fell in the dust, and died, as his beloved river kept on running. He had a brother, Maris, who saw him fall and die, and rushed in rage at artful Antilochus, eager to avenge his brother. Maris came forward with his spear by the corpse, but before he knew it, he, too, was a corpse, laid out gory beside his brother; for godlike Thrasymedes, bold in thought, Nestor's eldest son, had anticipated Maris' every movement, and took him down, after first taking his right arm, still holding its spear, clean off his body with one effortless swipe of his sword. Both heard the bones inside take the blade, and before Maris had even brandished his weapon, he had already gained his place in line at the gloomy gates of Hades, even now backed up, though its gates opened wide, as the dead awaited entrance to its dark. So the two brothers from Lycia lay in death together on the battlefield, turning more and more mangled underfoot as the battle raged on. Son of Oïleus Ajax, meanwhile, sprang on Cleobulus, and trammelled him up in his arms alive, there in the confused turmoil of spears and swords. Ajax, too, had a sword, and slashed his victim across his neck with his hilted weapon, and its two-edged blade grew warm with gushing blood, and Cleobulus was no more, but owned now by death and fate. And the last sight he'd seen with his eyes

was something like a dark cloud growing in colour, sea-gleaming,
 to take him inescapably. At the same time, Achaean
 hero Peneleos and the powerful Trojan Lyco
 rushed at each other with their own drawn swords, after their thrown spears
 had passed each other by, both wasting their chance to end it then
 and there. So now all their hope lay in their sword blades, as they charged
 each other. Lyco battered Peneleos on his helmet
 by the shuddering horsehair plume, and saw his hard blade shatter
 into a million pieces, leaving him with a worthless hilt
 in his hand, and Peneleos answered with a strike on Lyco's
 neck just under the ear, and the sharp blade sank in as softly
 as warmed butter splits apart when sliced, and the flesh opened wide,
 and Lyco's head dangled to one side with blank eyes, and his limbs
 went loose. And as Peneleos moved on to the next man, then
 Meriones, island Crete's colossal contribution
 to the war (second only to his leader Idomeneus),
 as quick-moving as any man met Acamas and pierced him
 with his blade as he made to step up into his chariot;
 but the only place Acamas was now destined to go to
 was death. Meriones watched with satisfaction as Acamas
 tumbled from the chariot and into the dust and the darkness.
 Idomeneus, meanwhile, close by, struck Erymas
 on the mouth with his cruel bronze, and the spear shattered all his teeth
 on its brisk passage into his brain, slicing the skull in two
 white halves to get to the priceless soft part in the middle;
 then cold Idomeneus looked into Erymas' eyes
 as they filled up with blood, and bloated like ripen grapes about
 to burst, then let him tumble to the earth, spraying the dark blood
 from every hole in his face; and death, even darker, took him away.

And so the leaders of the Danaans each took the life

of his man, and the bodies of corpses covered the wide plain,
 just as Olympian Zeus fills a pure-blue sky with a storm
 that darkens the earth, and the ways of the people under it.
 And like a weight dropped heavy upon the land, the rain-clouds
 in harvest-time burst open with furious showers, striking
 the earth with violence unrelenting, as if God resolved
 to punish the unrighteous, who gather at assembly
 to speak their perverse principles in hope of persuading men
 to follow their crooked ways, disregarding God all the while,
 and His power inconceivable. So, here, corpses dropped like
 rain : as if no man here existed to serve θέμις rightly,
 as she rightly merited. Yet not all men are unrighteous.
 So why must they, too, be punished, along with the criminals?
 Know, men, that the ways of Zeus cannot be understood by you.

So the furious showers falling down from heaven hammer
 the earth, on men who choose to ignore or to fear the vengeance
 of gods; and the autumn rivers bulk up in the storm showers
 to rapid torrents that roar down mountainsides and cut into
 the rock new channels, relentless as the path of Destiny
 that runs in one direction only, regardless of the choice
 or effort of men—and the tilled fields, the work of the people,
 are ruined, while the torrents descend into the black sea.

So punishment comes to the wicked, and to the good, and that's that.
 For good or ill, Zeus, at His choosing, washes this or that away,
 and as the mountain torrent rushes unstoppable, so all
 human movement rushes through the ways of Zeus' destiny.
 Even the greatest-hearted man cannot stop what is coming.

So heroic Patroclus kept seeking out the bloodiest spots

of combat, to join in, screaming commands at the Myrmidons while steering his fast-galloping horses; and as he tore through the enemy wildly, his swift chariot wondrous to see, its axle underneath spinning flat out, Trojans all round him spilled wounded or dead from their chariot-boxes, and their fine chariots overturned, clashing like cymbals along the rocks of the plain. But the rushing wheels of his own chariot only picked up speed as his immortal horses (those wondrous gifts from the gods to Peleus) leapt over the trench, chariot and all, and came down smoothly on the other side, pursuing the retreating Trojans. But the slow-moving Trojans still in the rear of the retreat crossed the trench in no handsome order, but all askew, and many, attempting a leap, plunged instead into the deep darkness, and sent back ghastly shouts of ruin.

And so as ravening wolves strike little lambs or baby goats, choosing which ones to seize from the flock, as the witless herdsman allowed them to scatter on the mountainside, and the smart wolves, seeing this, quickly seek out the young ones, who yet know nothing in their spirit of courage and fight : so the Danaans fell on the Trojans, disordered through fear and the Argive attack; and the enemy lost all spirit to burn the Argive ships, and hoped now primarily to survive the morning, as they were pushed further and further backward on the Scamander plain. The sounds of the fleeing Trojans were chaotic, their shrieks and cries, as they now had lost all the strength they'd had moments earlier.

And great-hearted Patroclus, as he sped through the enemy, kept his eyes peeled for Hector, whom he was determined to kill.

But Hector stood back at the ships, blood running all over him

from combat, as he attacked with spear and with sword, to keep man-eating death away. And Ajax watched bronze-armoured Hector move, and marvelled at Hector's skill in the fight, as he never revealed his broad shoulders from behind his heavy, thick-compressed bull's-hide shield, which made a mockery of the incoming shower of arrows and spears, whistling and whirling through air only to bounce off, with a clang, from Hector's clever cover.

And yet, all the while, δῖος Hector knew the tide of war had turned : Fortune had come, but Fortune had now withdrawn from him : and, with all else, the Myrmidons were now in the fight, even though where he now stood, fighting the rank-and-file Achaeans, was threatening enough, yet he stood his ground, and strove to save as many of his faithful and trusted men as possible.

Yet too quickly the moment arrived when Hector decided to flee from the Argive ships, for his army around him had now thinned dangerously, and his own obliteration beckoned where he stood. So he leapt up, the eldest son of Priam, into his chariot-box, and took the reins, and set his fast-galloping horses out and away, first over the rubble of the Wall, and then effortlessly over the trench, where Hector heard, from deep in the darkness, noises of Trojan men dying by their smashed chariots, and their snapped yoke-poles, and some stuck on the Achaean stakes and sliding down slowly. But his own horses, wondrously quick, hurried him away back on to the plain, in the direction of glittering Troy.

But Patroclus saw him, and ragefully urged the Myrmidons to come with him after the Trojans, to deliver the worst evil on them imaginable; for all the advantage was with

the Argives now. The Trojans' panic flight had succeeded most of all in confusing their army and clogging up the paths, slowing them down, and making themselves easy to pick off one by one; and their battle-lines were in utter disarray, and spread out helter-skelter in the choking cloud of dust rising from the horses straining in panic to leave the ship and tents for good and get back to the safety of the city. So, adding to the clamour was the groaning of their horses.

Patroclus, following a new idea, turned his chariot around, to appraise the sight of all the slow-moving Trojans still lingering in the rear of the retreat, coming from the ships, heading in his direction back onto the Scamander plain, moving hopefully toward the safety of their city; but he was in their way. Patroclus and the Myrmidons had severed the Trojan lines, and the bulk of the Argives had some Trojans surrounded now, those caught, helpless, between the trench and the ships. And Patroclus had no care to allow these men to ever step foot in their city again. But with his profound patience he raised his hand, and the mighty Myrmidons around him waited for these stragglers to come. Then, in sight of the city, he began to take them down, as soon as they had made it past the trench, and had come near the rushing river; and Patroclus punished many a Trojan idler for many of his dead friends. There, by the river rushing onward across the plain, where, far off, Troy's lofty towers glimmered in the sun, which was reaching the high point in the sky at last, Patroclus raised his shining spear, and with true aim cast at dawdling warrior Pronous, when the exhausted Trojan had lowered his shield, exposing his chest; so the death-bringing spear entered hapless Pronous, and that was that : his limbs went limp, and he dropped with a clang

to the ground, and with his last breath he gulped in a swallow of dust.

But Patroclus was already rushing on Enop's son
 Thestor, whose wondrous mother was a Naiad Nymph of river
 Sat-ni-oe-is-i-os. Crouching down in his chariot-box,
 he tried to conceal himself as if under rushing river-
 water. But Patroclus saw; and charged with his arms and armour glittering,
 and Thestor was so scared his trembling fingers dropped the reins
 (for he had lost his wits with terror), and Patroclus came near,
 and a spear-point tore through Thestor's jaw, and sheared his tongue in two,
 and fixed itself in the bones of his head. Patroclus, then, spear-
 pole in hand, led Thestor up and out of the chariot-box,
 just as a fisherman, comfortable on a rock, lifts up
 his fishing pole with a gleaming fish attached to its bronze hook;
 just so, as if leading his victim with fishing-line, Patroclus
 brought Thestor down to earth, face-first; and there, in that way, let him
 die. And when luckless Trojan warrior Eurylaus threw
 a stone that passed Patroclus by, Eurylaus was greeted
 with a blow upon his helmet that left his face disfigured.
 So his chariot-horses galloped on, but were now carrying
 a dead man. Other Trojans Patroclus introduced to Hades
 gate at this time of potent attack and confused retreat
 included Erymas, and Amphoterus, and Epaltes;
 also Tlepolemus, and Echius, and Pyris—each
 warrior with a distinguished paternity, but now extinguished.
 Also vanquished by δῖος Patroclus were Evippus and
 Polymelus, son of Argeas. All these men he brought down
 bloodied, one after another, into the dust at his feet.

Now, when the Lycian leader Sarpedon saw his own men
 collapsing at Patroclus' implacably quick hands,

he scolded all the warriors round him with words of reproach :

“Lycians! Where the hell do you think you’re going?

There’s nothing for it but go straight at the Argives!

—Achilles’ second! He’s cut down too many

of us! I’ll take him myself, and learn who he is!”

Thus spoke Sarpedon, one of Troy’s mightiest allies.

So he jumped from his chariot, his bronze armour blazing

with sunlight; and he hit the ground with a terrible rattle.

Answering this, Patroclus stepped down from his own chariot.

He was prepared to fight Sarpedon till one of them was dead.

They came at each other obliquely, sizing each other up,

just as vultures have crooked beaks, and crooked claws.

Then they ran at one another, howling bitter screams of rage.

Counsellor Zeus, synonym of Destiny, had a strange quirk :

in some cases, the events he permitted on earth upset him;

the creator was stung by his own creation. Now was one

such instance, as from high overhead he peered down on the two

heroes Sarpedon and Patroclus, and turned, vexed, to Hera,

his wife and sister and queen of heaven, and spoke out, saying :

“ὦ μοι ! I’ve set two men dear to me against one another!

Before what comes to be between them, I may change what occurs.

Fate on earth, in some cases, can be sculpted. Just now, my heart

is divided in two : whether to allow Sarpedon, whom

I honour, to fall before praiseworthy warrior Patroclus.

I wonder about lifting him up, the excellent Sarpedon,

while he still lives, and putting him down far from bitter combat,
in his beautiful and peaceful land of Lycia. Or do I let
him fall? For the hand of Patroclus is a powerful one,
and he is an exceptionally admirable warrior.”

Then the wide-eyed Queen Hera answered him :

“Son of Cronos! What words you speak! You say the most horrible
things to your queen! A man whose fate was decided long ago,
you would now rescue from death? Go on and do it, if you must,
but let me tell you not all the gods will approve of your meddling.

And may I say another word to my husband, who should be
listening to me? If you permit Sarpedon to escape to his home alive,
won't every other god with sons in the battle remove them
from horrid combat? For there are many sons fighting at Troy,
sons of Immortals, and your Sarpedon escapade will bring
a loud unrest up and down the Olympian assembly,
who will argue it with animosity, as they do.

But if this mere man is so beloved of you, and your heart
will mourn his death, then when Patroclus subdues him (and kills him),
and his breath of life leaves him forever, simply allow Death
and Sleep Everlasting to take the body back to beautiful
and peaceful Lycia. There, he will receive a burial
will all due respect by his brothers and friends and family,
and the tomb they raise for him will be of marble.
All that pageant is the prerogative of the noble dead.

So sit still, and let Patroclus subdue and kill Sarpedon.”

Thus spoke Hera, and her husband barely listened to her speak.
 He would do as he would do, and things would be as they would be.
 Even if that meant the son of Laodamia must die.

Then a bloody rain slipped through his fingers, and spilled down the sky,
 and pelted the warriors, who spoke in appalléd perplexity
 on the plain, and all the pother made their war-horses groan.
 And the Olympian sky dripped blood, because Zeus had a point
 to make : the life of a strong man would be dropped into Hades
 today, and all that excellence gone. At dawn a rain of blood
 had fallen, and had augured nothing auspicious for any of them.
 So here it was again, bitter drops from Zeus Supreme spattering
 their armour, this time showing honour to but one man, his son,
 whom Patroclus was destined to kill with his sharp-tipped weapon,
 far away from bucolic Lycia, his peaceful homeland.

So the gods watched Patroclus slash a path through Sarpedon's men,
 driving Achilles' own chariot with its god-given horses,
 as Sarpedon himself came forward, spear in hand, to meet him.
 First, Patroclus dispatched of bold Thrasymelus, Sarpedon's
 familiar, without much ado, spearing him in the abdomen,
 loosening his limbs entirely and finishing the man off.

Sarpedon then flung a well-aimed spear at Patroclus, but missed.
 Instead, he hit the trace-horse Pegasus tethered to the two
 immortal horses yoked up to the chariot pole. The spear-
 point entered the right shoulder of noble Pegasus, and when
 he felt it he let out a high-pitched scream, and his knees buckled
 under his quick-galloping pace, and he dropped to the earth;
 and Patroclus held on tight as his chariot tilted dangerously
 while the wounded Pegasus struggled, moaning, in the dust.

For the other two horses were tangled up in this deadweight,
 and they leapt in fear, and their yoke creaked under the powerful
 strain of their celestial strength. Patroclus could barely make
 sense of the reins while Pegasus was writhing on the ground.
 Then his animal breathed out his soul with one last sigh;
 and his spirit flew away. And at the same moment skilful
 Automedon brought an end to the disarranged chariot :
 he drew his dagger from his side and cut the third horse
 loose, losing no time while the other two horses thrashed
 about him wildly. But when they were righted they ran on,
 stretching the reins out tight, now firm in Patroclus' grip,
 and he steered them in the direction of Sarpedon,
 and he ran over any unlucky Achaean in his way.

And like a lion having leapt into a pasture of straight-
 horned cattle, Patroclus picked out a bull to pursue,
 his heart aflame, and his slaughterous jaws lusting for blood.
 Again Sarpedon cast a spear, and missed; he watched it somehow
 fly over his enemy's left shoulder, and pass him in vain.
 But Patroclus came close with his spear and the raised bronze flew from
 his hand into Sarpedon, straight into the seat of his heart.
 Sarpedon felt the bronze sink into his abundance of thoughts
 and feelings; and, trying to stand upright, he falteringly
 sank to one knee; and his face grimaced something unreadable.
 He lapsed as a tall oak falls, or a poplar, or pine, when high up
 in the head of some mountains the men come to axe the wood, for
 workers to shape it into planks, for sea-ships, to ride the waves out.
 Sarpedon lay lengthwise in front of his horses and chariot,
 staring at the sunlight and sky and howling through clenched teeth,
 and digging at the dirt, mixing his blood with the dust. In silence
 Patroclus watched him wrestle with death. All the Lycian shield-

bearing warriors watched their leader, exposed there on the earth.

And Sarpedon called out the name of his friend :

“Glaucus, pal, I’ve had it. You lead the men now. You have your orders. Make them fight this goddamn war with me in mind. Maybe they’ll stay alive long enough to honour me with a tomb of marble. But that would require you fighting for possession of my body. Whatever you choose to do is fine by me. Just keep attacking, till they kill you. (Though you ought to give up this ‘man among men’ business, and stop being so brave—it’s dangerous.) Forever now, ‘Sarpedon’ will be a byword for ‘dejection’ and ‘disgrace’. That’s an honour, Glaucus, isn’t it? To have fame, even if mocked? Stay strong, friend, and keep charging forward; and you’ll be a fine example for all. And if you want my dead body it’s yours.”

And at these last words he sighed, and death relaxed his warlike face. Patroclus planted his foot on his chest, then yanked out his spear, and saw Sarpedon’s heart dangling at the end of the pole : he had caught the last beat of the dead man’s heart. Now Sarpedon’s breath flew off into the sky, and would never come back to him.

The Myrmidons, meanwhile, held the dead man’s horses in check. The animals puffed and panted, and were eager to break away in panic flight, now that they no longer heard or felt their master.

And when it hit Glaucus, hard, that he would never again hear the voice of his friend, or look into his bright eyes, his heart hurt as it had never hurt before, for he suffered inside at the thought of bringing no help, no rescue, when he was needed.

And all this time he held his hand on his right arm, on the wound cut from one of Teucer's arrows at the battle at the Wall; though just now he barely felt it, as the dark blood flowed heavy, and dripped from his fingertips down onto the dust at his feet.

So he squeezed his wound with unforgiving strength until it felt as if his entire body was aflame, as punishment.

And in his mind he struggled to understand how Sarpedon, even Sarpedon, the son of Zeus himself, could lie there dead. Where was all-seeing Zeus when his son was falling in the dust?

Then, with a hard sigh, he spoke out a prayer to Apollo :

"Apollo, you whose aim is always straight and true, master both of life and of death, hear me now, if you will; hear a man who speaks out of great distress. My friend lies dead before me, and my own body seems not far behind. I cannot help protect what is left of him if I am dead too. Please help me. Heal me of this wound that will not stop, but ever bleeds, taking away what is left of me little by little, for all in all. Heal me, and I promise to fight with more than all of my strength up to now, and I will lead the Lycians wisely, with their safety at heart. And I will fight for the body of my friend, who has gone down before me to death."

So Glaucus prayed, in a whisper; and when he had completed his prayer, he looked down, and saw his wound cured, and the dark blood gone. And he felt no pain. And his heart swelled with strength.

And a complicated half-smile came to his face when he realised Apollo Healer had not only heard him, but helped.

But then the expression in Glaucus' face turned serious, and terrifying. Now his killing arm was loose again, and his fingers ready to grip weapons that tear through enemies.

Glaucus passed through his troops and entered into the Trojan ranks, and sought out Polydamas, and Agenor, and Aeneas, and heavily-armed Hector. When all the men stood together, Glaucus spoke out for all to hear, to leaders and soldiers both :

"At my feet," he said, "is Sarpedon, one of the best of us; and a son of Zeus besides, who lifted no finger in aid, for reasons we will never know, but must keep aware of. Sarpedon's command and hands brought down many an Achaean, and he rescued many a friend. But Achilles' second, Patroclus, has killed him. Ἄρης brings us bad fortune as well as good. Hector, now you must honour your allies, who have come far to give up their lives for your cause. Now, friend, and all our friends, come forward, and take your stand beside the next man with an unquenchable rage in your hearts, so that the enemy will hurt our fallen hero no further. We shall not let them insult his body and take his arms and armour, and do all else, in retaliation for all the Achaeans that lie dead by their goddamn ships. To the Myrmidons I say : fuck you."

So he spoke, and all the Trojan men lowered their heads in grief, grief as overpowering and intolerable as the fire of vengeance burning ever-hotter in their powerful hearts,

and hands. Though a man from afar, Sarpedon had been a prop
and support of the city; and many men had followed him;
and among his people he had proven himself bravest in combat.

Then Hector turned away, and with ever-escalating intent
for blood he strode to the front of the lines, and his men followed
him just as eagerly. Sarpedon had inspired a rage
in their hearts so great it left them light-headed (as spiritual
feelings do), but they quickly overmastered it, and focused
their concentration on killing. The time for words was over.

The Achaeans, meanwhile, watching confidently on their
portion of the field, were talking strategy. Good Patroclus
stood among the leaders. He addressed the two Ajaxes,
who radiated the heat of a forest fire that makes
one run away. But Patroclus stood up close to them and spoke :

“Now is the moment,” he told them, “to break their spirit.
Fight as the warriors you are, the two best that ever were.
One of their ‘best’ men now lies dead at their feet : unbeatable
Sarpedon, the first to tear down our Wall. I have beaten him.
Now we tear his body to pieces, and toss his arms and armour
into the dirt. If anyone gets in your way, take his life.”

Thus spoke Sarpedon, and the two Ajaxes liked what they heard.

So, while Zeus looked down from above, the two armies arranged
their lines of battle in order, facing each other with grim hostility :
the Trojans, the Lycians, the Myrmidons, the Achaeans :
and they joined in battle for the body of the man gone down
to death. Once more the broad sky filled up with light obscuring dust,

and terrible sounds; and ears rang with the clang of bronze on armour.
Zeus watched, while his dead son inspired destructive labour.

Pressing forward, the Trojans pushed back the hot-eyed Achaeans,
who sought to get to Sarpedon's dead body. And Agales
came forward, great-hearted Ageles, a gutsy Myrmidon
from venerable Budeum, where his father reigned as king
over the many people there. But when Agales murdered
a family relation (some say cousin, others nephew),
he fled to Phthia and its king, Peleus, husband to Thetis
of the sea, nymph who breaks the silvery waves, body dappled
in brine : there Ageles went as suppliant, and was sent out
to follow Achilles, their son, the warrior who devastates
whole lines of warriors, to Ilium, whom everyone knew
as a place that bred beautiful horses. So that was how he
found himself moving on his elbows and knees, low to the ground,
sneaking up, through pounding combat, to the corpse of Sarpedon.
And he felt confident when he put his hands on the body;
but then Hector smashed his head in with a large rock, shattering
it to fragments inside his bashed-in helmet, and his body
fell face-first onto dead Sarpedon, and his spirit flitted
to the darkness beneath the earth. And mighty Patroclus
breathed fury when he saw his friend fall, turning grief into rage,
and attacked the fighters at the front like a hawk picking off
jack-daws and starlings. Just as straight and fast did good Patroclus,
master of horses, move against the Lycians, and Trojans,
in a frenzy of vengeance to answer the fallen warrior.
He leapt on Sthenelaus and broke his neck, shattering the bones
with his bare hands; and all the enemy, Hector included,
took a step back. The Achaeans then shoved the enemy as
far back as a man can cast a javelin in a contest;

or a spear amid slaughterous war : just this far the Argives
 pushed the Trojans. Yet Lycian leader Glaucus, steering his horses
 in at an oblique angle, flung his spear at noble Bathycles.
 Bathycles was highly distinguished among the Myrmidons,
 and had left behind him a home of great wealth in Hellas
 to come to fight. But now Glaucus' spear shot straight through his chest,
 from seemingly out of nowhere; and Bathycles tumbled
 from his chariot (which sped on without him) and clattered on
 the earth. And all the Achaeans who saw this became enraged,
 for a good man had fallen; but the Trojans who saw, rejoiced
 with cheers. The Argives immediately surrounded the body,
 and with gleaming fury rushed forward into the Trojan lines.
 So Argive hero Meriones took down Laogonus,
 who had been very well equipped for battle—but to no purpose
 in the end. His father was Onetor, an interpreter
 of dreams and priest of Zeus at sacred Ida, and was honoured
 as a god by those who knew of him. But now Meriones
 stole the life out of his son when his spear tore through his head,
 striking him under the jaw by the ear, and awful darkness
 took him to where he would live on only in his father's dreams.
 Aeneas, meanwhile, cast his bronze spear at Meriones,
 and advanced on him from under the shelter of his shield,
 intending on bringing him down eye-to-eye. Meriones,
 however, had very good eyesight, and avoided the spear
 by crouching down, and the bronze flew over his head, and stuck fast
 in the earth, its ash pole quivering, until Ἄρης lowered
 his heavy hand and stilled it. And Aeneas frowned, and spoke out :

“Meriones! I'll make you into a fine dancer yet!

Just let me keep hurling spears at you, until one of them hits!”

Meriones, then, great man-killing warrior, answered him :

“Aeneas, no man hits the mark again and again, without
a miss now and then; and you, my friend, are just another man.
Which means if I throw my spear at you, you’ll quickly feel it.
All that trust in the strength of your hands will come to nothing.
But you will go somewhere—straight down to the horses of Hades!”

Thus spoke Meriones, invoking the four immortal horses
fastened to the golden chariot of the god of the dead :
Orphnaeus and *Nycteus*, both black as stormiest night;
blazing *Aethon*; and *Alastor*, whose very name means Vengeance
Insufferable, Unceasing and Accursed. These four horses ride
into the light to bring back whoever is destined to leave it.

Then Patroclus shouted out :

“*Meriones!* Enough of that! No more words!
Words will not cut a passage to the corpse,
nor move them away from it! Some of them
must lie next to it first, then they will go.
So shut the hell up!—and attack!”

So saying, Patroclus charged forward, and the army followed
behind him; and the swords and spears, and the clashing shields,
sent a clamour up from the impartial earth into the air;
and just as mountain travellers hear the work of wood-cutters
in the valley, but from far off these noises come to be heard,
just so extensive was the noise rising from the Scamander Plain.

And not even a close friend of Sarpedon’s would recognize

him now. His body was lost, head to foot, in the turmoil
 of aerial spears and arrows, and blood and dust, and warriors
 engaged in close combat, who crowded round the corpse like flies
 buzzing round the bubbling milk-pails on a farm in springtime,
 when the milk overflows the bowls : like that they met round the corpse.

No longer did Zeus turn his shining eyes away from the fight.
 He watched, and pondered at the centre of himself (the centre
 of everything) over Patroclus, δῖος Patroclus.

Zeus wondered very much about the killing of Patroclus.
 As godlike Sarpedon now lay dead amid the fierce combat,
 so should Hector with his sword kill Patroclus? And rip the armour
 off his shoulders? Or should he, Zeus, allow the labour of war
 to continue indefinitely, stubbornly adding to
 the rising pile of the dead? For the moment, this is what
 Zeus decided : the noble friend of Achilles, Patroclus,
 should push Hector and the Trojans back toward the city of Troy,
 and many more fresh souls will be given to his brother, Hades.

So, down by the Scamander River, winding through the plain,
 Hector suddenly stopped. He felt a strangeness in his spirit :
 his intuition told him to flee. This was an incredible
 thought to Hector, but, still, he stepped up into his chariot,
 turned the horses round, and, with a wave of his arm, commanded
 his army to follow him back toward the city in retreat.
 Because somehow Hector felt the balance of Zeus' scales
 begin to turn.

And the Lycians, too, had a terrible feeling, when they
 saw the corpse of their king with his powerful heart torn out,

stopped forever amid the flow of light and air and life. Worse,
if that was the word, was the sight of the Argives stripping him,
Sarpedon, mighty Sarpedon, of his sparkling breast-plate.

The corpse was lying there amid the welter of dead bodies.

There were very many dead bodies, for very many were
falling while Zeus, author of Time, drew out war's sad duration.

So the Lycians followed Hector in the general retreat;
and Patroclus handed Sarpedon's armour to his soldiers,
and ordered them to carry it all back to the precious ships.

Zeus, who assembles the clouds in the sky, or takes them away,
summoned leader of the Muses Apollo to his side. He
came in garments out-glistening the bronze, and Zeus spoke to him :

"Up, my shining one! Go wash the wine-dark blood from Sarpedon.
Take him away from the struggle of men, and bathe him in the river-
stream. Have his skin shrouded in ambrosia and sacred garments.
Then give him to guides to bring to joined-twin brothers Sleep and Death.
They shall put him to rest in his peaceful land of Lycia."

Thus spoke Zeus, and Apollo followed his father's command,
and Sarpedon's honoured body was returned to his homeland.

Back on the battlefield, Patroclus called for his horses,
and summoned his driver, Automedon, and together they
pursued the Trojans and Lycians. He was unwitting
that all of his decisions now were leading toward his death.
But does that mean that *all* of his decisions now were wrong?

Such questions are beyond our understanding. Zeus, superior
in mind to all else, sends courageous men into retreat, and

takes victory out of their hands. All this he does easily.

Or, he infuses a man with a powerfully concentrated will to fight. Thus, now, for reasons only he would ever know, Zeus Supreme let sacred fury loose in the heart of Patroclus.

Who, then, did Patroclus kill at this time on the battlefield, though he himself was cursed to die? First to fall was Adrastus, then Autonomous, καὶ Echeclus, καὶ Perimus, καὶ Epistor, καὶ Melanippus; and also Elasmus καὶ Mulius, and καὶ τε Pylartes. These were the names of the men brought down by Patroclus that hour. All others were delivered from his fury only by fleeing from him, and so lived on, and joined the retreat.

The Argives surged against the Trojans till the two armies struggled by the high stone wall surrounding the city of Troy. Patroclus looked ready to take Troy on his own command; and ragefully he reached one colossal corner of the wall, which ran up high into the clouds, where Apollo Shooter took his stand. When Patroclus put his foot against the wall (a sign that the city was threatened with imminent ruin) while spearing Trojans dead all round him, and his Myrmidons advanced on the city gates, leaving a widespread carnage in their wake, then Apollo placed a silver arrow on his bow, and let fly at Patroclus. And the arrow slammed against his shield, knocking his foot off the wall and leaving him shaken; and three times Apollo shot at Patroclus, his arrows hammering Patroclus' shield with three gigantic blows, the god shoving away the man from the wall with certain aim and immortal bow. And Patroclus concluded a god now was helping the Trojans, yet charged at the wall a fourth time; and with one hand holding his spear and the other on the hilt

of his sword, he made ready to continue killing, then stopped cold. And all the Myrmidons saw their leader on the battlefield begin to take steps backward, retreating from his offensive, and the Myrmidons were mystified. But they did not know that Apollo had just spoken into the ear of Patroclus, saying :

“Zeus-born! Go back! Fate shall not have you obliterate Troy with your hands. Nor will Achilles either, with his stronger hands.”

At that, the voice of Apollo, Patroclus retreated from the sky-high wall of the city of Troy.

Meanwhile, Hector’s quick-galloping horses approached the Scaean gate, and there he slowed his chariot, mystified in mind. Should he lead the entire army within the walls of the city, or turn round and drive back into the fight?

So Apollo spoke into the ear of Hector too, saying :

“Hector, why retreat now? Slinking away from the battlefield is abominable. That’s not you. You are not weak, but strong. So turn the chariot round and make straight for Patroclus, and if you kill him you shall win the admiration of Apollo.”

Thus Apollo Hunter; and as the high sun broke through the air-borne dust, so Hector, his bronze armour glinting in a sunbeam, looked all around him for enemy Patroclus. And again, but this time so close to their goal, the Argives met resistance from the Trojans, as Apollo flew over the battlefield,

and loosened the order of the Achaean lines, and dissolved their offensive into confused motion and failure, yet again, so that Hector and his army might win glory.

So a panic blazed through the heart of the Argive warriors while they fought in the shadow of Ilium's sky-high wall, as Apollo of Health and Harm flew over the battlefield.

Hector then saw Patroclus in the midst of the fight, and turned to his charioteer, the combat-wise Cebriones, and gave order to lash the horses into battle, and charge forward straight to Patroclus. Apollo, meanwhile, watched from above.

And Patroclus saw Hector racing at him; he saw how Hector ignored the fight around him, and let the other warriors be, as in single-minded pursuit he closed in on his goal.

So Patroclus readied himself to face off, and raised his spear—but in his left hand; for in his right he held a stone, jagged and crushing, that he kept hidden in his fingers. So he stood in perfect balance, and kept his eyes on Hector's chariot as it came close; then Patroclus threw the rock, a perfect shot that hit between the eyes of Cebriones, a half-brother of Hector's. The rock hit him with such force that the driver dropped the reins and tumbled backward out of the chariot-box, and Hector grabbed the chariot rim for support while his horses ran free and wild, and he ground his teeth at the loss of Cebriones.

Now Patroclus' rock hit the hapless Cebriones so hard that bone shattered, and by the time the charioteer hit the dirt, both his eyeballs had spilled out of his head.

He hit the dirt, but kept falling, down into the blind darkness
beneath the earth, for he was already dead; so his body
lay there, limp and spiritless.

And Hector leapt out of his out-of-control chariot,
and came down hard in his shining armour with a rattle.
Breathing heavily, he glared hatefully at Patroclus,
who was about to shout out to him, then thought better of it.

Instead, he sprang at the fallen body of Cebriones
with the fury of a lion with an arrow in its breast
yet ravaging the farmyard regardless, and his own courage
invites his ruin, and brings it. Just so did Hector spring at
Patroclus, like a second lion fighting for the dead deer
at their feet, both terribly hungry and hell-bent on fighting
for their prize, battling together up on the mountain heights.
The two warriors Patroclus and Hector battered each other
ruthlessly with their swords while stepping carefully round the body,
lest one fall and face certain death at the blade of the other.
Meanwhile, some Trojans had grabbed hold of Cebriones' head,
and some Achaeans held his two feet firmly, and neither end
would let go; but all this neither fighter noticed as they clashed
in mighty combat. And their terrible passion for each other's death
caught fire in both armies, and spread swiftly outward. No one
thought of retreat, only destructive advance, and both armies
contrived cataclysmic havoc as they sprang on one another,
as the South and East Winds combine in a deep forest to tear
all the trees apart—the long-stretched beech, ash, pine—and the clamour
of hissing leaves and snapping branches and falling tree-trunks fills
the stormy sky : so around Cebriones' body came an
aerial assault of spears and arrows, some mauling men, some

fixing in the earth, some sticking in the hapless corpse : and the feathered arrows kept flying off the bow-strings, and many huge rocks came soaring in to shatter indefensible shields and flatten men; and all this while, as they fought round his body, the dead Cebriones lay motionless in the whirling dust, a shadow of a magnitude; and with his death much knowledge of the art of driving the war-chariot was lost forever.

Now the sun had reached the zenith of its daily round. And back and forth flew the arrows and spears, many reaching their mark, and the warriors on both sides kept falling. But at the hour when the oxen in the fields are liberated from the yoke, and the farmers savour their early afternoon meal, then the balance-scales of fate weighed toward the Achaeans, and they proved themselves to be the better men. So they dragged off Hector's half-brother Cebriones, and stripped off the armour from his body, as war-spoils, while the noise of battle thundered round them. And Patroclus rushed (now here, now there), as he charged on the enemy, and brought down many Trojan warriors to the dust with his quick-moving spear, a very ἄνηρ in human form, and he killed twenty-seven men. Then, after a moment's rest, Patroclus charged again, like a god, but this time he was to face actual gods, who bring men beginnings and endings : for the god Apollo, not here the Far-Shooter, not here the Healer, not here the Averter of Harm, not here the Rescuer—not to Patroclus : to him Apollo came as the god of awful sacrifices. And he came in a sudden blast of blinding sunlight that obscured Patroclus' sight, and the battlefield whirled before his eyes : and someone (it was Apollo) knocked the very helmet off his head, and it clanged on the ground in the midst of the galloping feet of the horses :

Patroclus' plumed helmet, dishonoured in the dust, its horse-hair stained with blood. Never before had this helmet hit the dirt, but had ever protected the graceful head of Achilles, who have given it for Patroclus to wear : but now Zeus Orderer had granted it to Hector to lift and put upon his head. And in the storm of battle, the spear in Patroclus' hand broke apart, just like that, however heavy, massive, and strong it had been, with its lethal sparkling bronze-point. And his shield fell away from his shoulders when its buckled strap was cut, and it clattered in the dirt at his feet : and when Patroclus looked down, then Zeus' son himself, Apollo of the Mice, undid his clutching breast-plate, thereby exposing his vulnerable chest. And all these things—the blinding light, the snapped spear, the helmet, the loosened corslet—all these things happened simultaneously to Patroclus, whose only response could be incredulity, and momentary bewilderment. Then it turned worse for him, when a spear entered his shoulder. It was a successful cast by Panthous' son Euphorbus, who surpassed all his Trojans in the spear, and in chariot-fighting, and in speed of action; and already he had picked off twenty Achaeans when they had come too close in their chariots to Euphorbus, master of war. So now he had injured the wondrous Patroclus, who came to his senses when the spear-point entered his body. Enraged beyond telling, Patroclus reached behind him and yanked the spear out of him; and when glorious Euphorbus, master of war, saw this, he fled back into the thick of his army, unwilling to face his opponent any more in any way, regardless of how exposed Patroclus now stood in the fray, and with a bloody wound besides. Patroclus, too, retreated back among his men, completely baffled, and fearing terrible fate.

But Hector had kept his eye on Patroclus the entire time and sprang onto him now, and the two fell onto the ground, Patroclus in Hector's quickly-crushing arms. And the two men were almost nose to nose, they heard and felt each other's breathing and their eyes bored into one another's : and Patroclus tried to extricate himself but Hector's arms would not budge. Then he saw a dagger in the air, rising in front of him, and he grabbed at Hector's arm, but Hector pushed down, strenuously, and the dagger point pierced Patroclus' chest : and he breathed out, and heard Hector speaking to him, softly now :

"Patroclus, you came to destroy our city and take away our freedom, and our women back to whatever hellhole you come from, whatever 'dear, native fatherland'. But I have destroyed you. You lose. In front of everyone you have now met Hector. And this dagger proves that I am leader of the war-loving Trojans. I defend them from this fatal chance of yours. You, meanwhile, will be eaten by the vultures piece by piece. Where is Achilles to help you? Where is the great Achilles now? This dagger of mine you feel proves his love. And I'm sure he commanded this before you entered the field : 'Don't come back, Patroclus, master warrior, until you have soaked Hector's tunic red with his blood.' This, I think, he said to you, while you came here, and he waits behind. And now he will wait forever. And all the confidence you came here with, has brought you to this."

And Patroclus felt the dagger continue its slow killing drive into his flesh, and his struggling ceased, for his energy was gone. But still you spoke, Patroclus. Answering Hector, he said :

“Celebrate while you can, Hector. But you’re mistaken. The gods undid me in a moment. If they’d never come I’d’ve killed twenty of you. Apollo killed me, not you. And at that time some other Trojan wounded me. So you’ve come to me a bit late in my killing. So I wouldn’t feel so victorious. But remember I said this when the right moment comes : Achilles is going to kill you.”

And so by this time Hector’s dagger was in Patroclus’ heart, and death took him away into the darkness of Hades, leaving behind a body of exceeding strength and beautiful youth. But his soul was gone. Yet δῖος Hector spoke anyway :

“So you say, dead man. Some prophesy of death came true for you at least. I say Achilles will lie dead at my feet. I will take his life too.”

So spoke Hector, and slipped his dagger out of the dead body. Then he turned to destroy the charioteer Automedon, but he was gone. His fast-footed horses, the immortal ones, given to Peleus by the gods, had taken him away, those very beautiful gifts.

End of

Bk XVI

Book 17

Son of Atreus Menelaus saw good Patroclus collapse
 in death, down within the terrible horde of Trojan warriors,
 where his ruined body in the moving onslaught lay hidden.
 So Menelaus slashed a passage through the front lines in bronze
 armour that caught the sun and flashed it back blindingly, dazzling
 his enemy; and came to the body. He stood over it in awe,
 as a mother stands over her newborn calf, before then unschooled
 in motherhood, and calls out to her young with a plaintive sound.
 Then Menelaus secured the well-balanced shield on his arm,
 and tightened his grip on the spear in his right hand, and prepared
 to kill whichever enemy warrior came close to him :
 Menelaus was ready to defend the corpse from insult.

Then brave Euphorbus shouted out from among the Trojan throng :

“Menelaus! Zeus’ best beloved! Commander of men
 who cannot win! Back away from the body! Leave its armour
 to the victors! (Though you can wipe the blood off it if you like!)
 I, Euphorbus, was the first to strike Patroclus with the spear
 in war! So step away, and allow me my glory among
 the Trojans! Otherwise I take aim, and kill you, and end your
 honey-sweet life!”

And Menelaus replied scornfully, addressing the crowd :

“Father Zeus! Can such large words fit inside a mouth? No leopard,
 no lion, no wildest of destructive-minded wild boars,
 is so in love with its own strength as are Panthous’ three sons!
 Or you best make that two sons now, since Hyperenor is dead,

the 'mighty' Hyperenor, 'tamer of horses' and 'good with the spear'—but not good enough, not when he met me! Like you he came at me first with words; so I took him in his youth! When he's brought home with the feet of others, and his cheerful wife and noble parents see him there before them dead, do you think they'll make light of me then? You think they'll call Achaeans cowards? It's Hyperenor who's brought them no glory! And now it is Euphorbus' turn to come forth from wherever he's hiding and face me! But only a fool would do that! Be a smart fighter, and show no desire to learn from me!"

Euphorbus then stepped forth from the lines of his army, and stood face to face with Menelaus. He spoke out to him, saying :

"Menelaus, I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you, and bring your head back to my brother's wife, now a widow in her bridal bed; and to ease the grief of our parents Panthous and Phrontis, honoured elders of Troy. You and I fight now. And only one of us will walk away."

So said Euphorbus, who threw his spear at Menelaus' impeccable shield; but the spear-point bent sidewise when it hit, and the ashen shaft fell pointless at Menelaus' feet.

Next, in answer to this, son of Atreus Menelaus rushed on Euphorbus, while praying to Zeus Father as he approached : and he raised his spear and drew it back : then thrust it through the throat of Euphorbus. And he leaned his weight hard into the spear, confident in his strength, so the spear-point tore through the neck and burst out the back : and the sharp bronze tip dripped with bloody flesh.

And large-talking Euphorbus, silent now, toppled to the dirt,
and his shining armour rattled round his dead limbs. And that was that.

Now Menelaus stepped forward and tore off Euphorbus'
helmet, and was surprised at what he saw. The dead man was handsome.
His hair, though his own blood now soaked it through, was as exquisite
as the hair of the three Graces. His long locks were intertwined with slender gold
and silver strands. Menelaus regarded these beautiful shining braids.
But all that beauty was wasted now. Such as when a man plants
a sprout that promises to bloom into a luxuriant tree of olives,
setting it in a lonely place where fresh water bubbles in abundance,
a fine sapling, one ready to grow and thrive; and in light breezes
it quivers, and it swells out with white blossoms of great beauty.
But then from out of nowhere comes a mighty storm that uproots
the sprout and leaves it lying low on the earth. So in this way
did Menelaus come to set young Euphorbus on the ground;
and now in front of the entire Trojan army he began
to tear the fine armour off the dead body's limbs, in insult.

So now the Trojan warriors had a decision to make.
As when a lion of the mountain strides proudly into
pastureland and seizes the most beautiful animal in
its eyes : so the heifer's neck is crushed in the lion's stern jaws :
and as the lion greedily gulps down the entrails and blood,
he hears the hounds, and herdsman calling, and sees them coming :
and the mighty lion has to decide what next to do :
just so, in this case, not a single Trojan came forward to
face off against Menelaus, so glorious Menelaus
could feast off Euphorbus' armour, at apparent leisure—

—If not for Mentès, leader of the Cicones, who rushed off
to find Trojan leader Hector, and spoke out to him, saying :

“Hector! Menelaus has defended Patroclus’ body
and killed Panthous’ son Euphorbus! Another of our best is gone!”

So spoke Mentès, unaware he was forwarding Apollo’s plan;
then he re-entered awful combat, leaving Hector alone
to experience great grief for Euphorbus. Then his spirit
turned dreadfully dark, when he saw in the midst of battle
the one tearing the armour off, and the other lying
dead in the dirt, while blood gushed from his open wound.

So Hector sent out a terrible cry that set his men a-
shiver, as he strode forth in his glinting bronze armour into
the bristling front lines : and his battle-cry, in power not
unlike the inextinguishable flame of Hephaestus,
roused his men to greater fury.

Menelaus, too, heard the nerve-shattering cry, as he stood
over Euphorbus, with the body of Patroclus behind
him, protecting it from Trojan hands. Then he contemplated
two hopeless alternatives, and he had to decide on one
quickly:

“ὦ μοι !” thought Menelaus. *“Leave behind Patroclus and I
face the enmity of every Achaean. (As soon as they hear
of it!) Yet if I stand here I face a bloodbath, with Hector
in his goddamn eye-blinding armour leading his warriors
over me like a wave. But why am I wasting time thinking?
If heaven is motivating the Trojan advance, then no*

*man can censure my flight! No man would fight the gods willingly!
Hector has Zeus or Apollo in his arm, so the smart thing
to do is get the hell out of here. No man scoffs at the fist
of heaven. Okay. But just let me find Ajax. Together
we'll come into the battle—even if it is against heaven!
Together we'll rescue the body for Peleus' son
Achilles. That sounds like the most bearable of evils."*

And as Menelaus debated at heart, Hector came on
with his warriors behind him in an overwhelming wave
in Menelaus' direction. So the son of Atreus
fled, and left the corpse of Patroclus behind. Yet he wasn't
pleased about it, and like that lion in the farmyard avid
to keep eating in the face of oncoming dogs and herdsmen
but has no choice but to flee, so did Menelaus' heart
turn cold, while he abandoned the body of Patroclus.

Now, when Menelaus once more stood immersed in his army
lines, he looked all round him for Telamon's son Ajax, the most
powerful Achaean on the field just now. So he was shocked
when he finally spotted him, to see him not in the fight,
but directing the fight, there on the far left of the battle-
theatre, apparently because of the breakdown of order,
and the many injuries to the leaders and commanders.
Menelaus beheld the chaos of his lines with horror,
and could only assume that Zeus or Apollo was limiting
the Argive attack, for reasons Menelaus couldn't know,
or care to think about just now. Just now, the important thing
was to get unbeatable Ajax to lift up his spear and start
killing. So Menelaus set off running, and when he came
to Ajax, he spoke out with winged words, saying :

“Ajax, friend, this way; come defend the body of dead Patroclus!
We can get his body back to Achilles, but not his armour;
all that’s now held by Hector—wearing Patroclus’ helmet.”

Thus spoke Menelaus. So war-wise Ajax quit the left flank,
and together they pushed their way through the struggling warriors,
and made it to the front lines, so they might protect Patroclus’
body.

Meanwhile, Hector’s plan, as he finished stripping that body
of all its finery, was to hack the head from its shoulders,
and drag away what was left and toss it to the dogs of Troy.

Ajax, though, was coming, hoisting his shield thick as a city wall
before him. And Hector hadn’t the weapons to face that shield,
not just now. So Hector, commander of the Trojan forces,
retreated into his army and vanished from sight, leaving
lying there the dead, bloodied, naked body of Patroclus.

Ajax, then, came to the body, and covered it with his shield.
And he stood by Patroclus like a lion over his young,
when they meet hunters on their way through the forest.
Then the lion, exulting in his fury, lowers his brows
to narrow his eyes, and makes ready to spring :
just so did Ajax breathe out fury by his fallen ally.

Menelaus, dear to Ἄρης , stood close by Ajax, nursing
in his heart great grief for the fallen champion Patroclus;
and now he was ready to defend the unforgettable hero.
Yet, for the moment, the enemy found no courage to rush them.

At the same time, behind the Trojan front lines, powerful Glaucus found Hector, his commander, putting the stolen Achaean armour into a chariot bound for the city. Glaucus scowled at Hector. Then the leader of the Lycian men spoke out to the mighty Trojan, saying :

“Hector, what’s this you’re doing? Where’s all your famous courage now?

I suppose all your beauty people speak of gives no benefit in combat, does it? So our greatest fighter is a coward!

A runaway! On your way out of here you best start thinking

how to beat the enemy with only the Trojan people

behind you, because my Lycians and the other allies

will no longer fight for a man who gives them not a shred

of thanks, though we kill the Achaeans continually,

without taking a breath. Why would any of us expect you

to stand by us now, cruel bastard, when noble Sarpedon,

both your guest, and your friend, you left there for the Argives

to take, like leaving food for birds of prey. This man did so much

for you and your city, when he lived. But then he dies, and you

dare show no courage to recover the body, happy for the dogs

of Troy to have found a large meal to feast on. So now watch Troy

be eaten by the enemy, as soon as the Lycians

leave the field. Your city will collapse in flames and we’ll be on

the waves, going home! So you better find your courage, like it

or not, and hope to have no fear—you must be what men are when they

are called to defend their homeland. You must beat the evil back,

no choice. If you had a man’s courage, this chariot would have

Patroclus’ body in it. That would be going to the city, not you. And

if we had his body, then very quickly the Argives would give us

Sarpedon, both his armour and his body. This Patroclus,

the man you've just killed, is the best friend of the strongest man the Argives have! This man, moreover, has a very powerful army behind him. Unfortunately, you won't even stand eye to eye with Ajax, though all true men are out there fighting. Against you Ajax has shown himself to be the better man."

Hector then gave Glaucus a dark look, appallingly frightful, and spoke :

"Glaucus! What the hell are you talking about? I understand—you're upset. So am I. Let me show you how upset I am. Take me to Ajax. Watch me fight, and you'll come back to yourself. You see the helmet on my head, don't you? You think the Argives just gave it to me? Think again; I took it off Patroclus.

Glaucus, you're the wisest man to ever come from deep-soiled Lycia. You know what I am on the field. So let's go. Whether we fight with Zeus' favour or not, we go. He'll give victory, or he won't. The only certainty is, he encourages fighting.

Come now and stand beside me and watch me work, and then decide whether I'm the coward you've called me. Think it over while I kill man after man defending an already dead man."

So spoke Hector, who then gave command to his army, saying :

"All you Trojans! All you Lycians! All you Dardanians!
All you now fighting!—*Fight harder!* Friends, think what it means to be a man, and fight harder! This helmet I wear is Achilles', the great Achilles, who gifted it to his dear Patroclus; but I killed his dear friend and took his armour for myself! Then I left his worthless body for the vultures to feed on!

Now I shall put on the rest, while you keep feeding the birds
with new-fallen filth! Then we'll see who's fated the victory!"

So Hector turned round to take the armour back into his hands,
only to discover that the chariot carrying it all had
already started for the city. So Hector broke into a run
after it, and wondrous was the speed of his feet as he reached
his men on the chariot. He ordered them to halt; then he
reached inside and took out the armour that had once protected
Patroclus. While the man-consuming combat raged in the
distance, δῖος Hector fitted pieces of the stripped armour
onto his body, just enough to boost the morale of his men,
and insult the enemy cold-heartedly. On his shoulders,
and on his legs, Hector now wore immortal armour given
by the gods to the father of Achilles, and then passed down
to the son, who had indeed gifted it to dear Patroclus.
But the son, regardless of immortal armour, would never
reach the venerable age of his noble father Peleus;
too soon he'd go down to wander Hades in search of his friend.

Now, far above the gathering storm-clouds, Zeus Orderer gazed
down on δῖος Hector standing on the sidelines of battle,
outfitting himself in the celestial armour given
by the gods to Peleus, noble father of Achilles.
The god of everything laughed at the presumption of human
beings who follow their confidence, even the best of them,
even as they have no idea of what is what. Thus, Zeus must
teach them. Off on his own, he spoke only to himself, saying :

"Miserable man, you know not what you're doing. You're standing
in armour that is not your own, nor was ever meant for you.

Shudders fill those who see the man in that armour facing them.
 He is the hero. Hector, you should shudder for your own fate,
 in that armour. Your virtue is telling—you brought a mighty
 man to nothing, Patroclus lies dead in the dust—but I must
 avenge this insolence with the armour you stole. That was not
 for you. And you should not have stripped a hero's head and shoulders.
 Supremacy in war may be yours to enjoy now, but your
 skill will not prevail over the sky. You shall not return
 in glory from the battlefield. I will punish you, because
 Olympians can. You will not lay that armour before your
 wife Andromache. You will learn that this will never happen.”

Thus spoke Zeus, who, curiously, had ensured that the precious
 body armour fitted Hector in the first place : but Zeus Orderer
 is always far ahead of understanding, and humans can make
 neither heads nor tails of his reasoning, however much they try.

So δῖος Hector returned to combat. He strode through the lines,
 feeling an increase of strength in his arms to match Ἄρης
 Warmaker himself; and all men who saw him thought him at
 maximum power and confidence. Hector strode though his
 army shining in the fine pieces of exquisite armour
 that Achilles had given Patroclus as a gift; and many
 of his warriors were heartened to see their commander
 in the armour of the enemy—Mesthles τε Medon
 τε Thersilochus τε Asteropaeus τε Deisenor τε
 Phorcys τε Hippothous τε Ennomus τε καὶ Chroraius
 the visionary, he who reads the birds in flight. All these men
 Hector encouraged, and he spoke to them with winged words :

“All of you, hear me now! Men of peoples incalculable,

to each a neighbour and an ally! You came here not to stand round me to boost my confidence, but to rescue the women and babies of Troy from these war-loving fiends! I have fed you, and given you many gifts, so that you should be strong in heart and hand! So now we go, and that's that! Live or die : as it is, it shall be! For this is war, and this is where you are! Whoever forces Ajax to fall back, and whoever drags the dead body of Patroclus into Trojan lines, you champions shall receive riches incalculable from me personally, to rival my own spoils, once we pulverize this war-loving filth to death!"

So spoke Hector, and his men fell heavily upon the enemy with redoubled strength, leaning into their spears with all their weight and running them through many writhing bodies, dropping many dead and wounded into the dust minute by minute, as all struggled to prevail at Patroclus' dead body, and be the lucky one to drag it away from under Ajax's annihilating hand. Fools. Instead, Ajax killed many men by the side of Patroclus.

But during all this slaughter Ajax turned to Menelaus, and spoke, saying :

"Friend Menelaus! Getting ourselves out alive is now our primary objective, don't you think? We must leave the body for the dogs and birds of Troy or you and I will lie beside it! Thicker than the dust are the warriors crowding in on us, and I see our ruin as I have never seen it before. I think you'll agree you must summon every leader we have, and now!"

Thus Ajax spoke, and Menelaus had no argument with him.

Instead, he cried out with great exertion into the loud-sounding
Danaan warriors fighting weapon to weapon and hand
to hand, and said :

“Friends all! Heroes and leaders of the Argives! All those who sit
at the table by Agamemnon and Menelaus, and
share the wine, then dispense your commands, each man to his people!
All of you who share in the honour and glory of Zeus! Come now!—”

And Menelaus stopped, for the dark dense war-cloud obscured his
men, and before his eyes he saw only dark shadows struggling
in chaos : then he continued on, shouting out :

“Come to me now, all of you! With outrage that Patroclus should
lie as amusement for the dogs of Troy!”

So he spoke, and the quick-moving Ajax, son of Oïleus,
heard him clear. So he came running through vast confusions to stand
by Menelaus, the first warrior to arrive. Then came
Idomeneus and his faithful second, Meriones
the man-destroying. But of all the other Argive heroes
who came running in defence of good Patroclus’ body,
and fired up the spirit of all the Achaeans in combat,
who alive has the genius to name the names of all these men?

So they came, and fenced round good Patroclus, their shining shields raised;
but these shields were clouded by rising dust, making it harder
for Hector and his army to fight cleanly for the body :
no one could say how many men were there, or where they might spring from.

Still, the Trojans forced themselves forward in colossal numbers,
intent on getting to the ruined body of Patroclus.

So they came on, just as a gathering wave rises up to roar
against the mouth of a river, a river blessed with rain from Zeus,
but the wave crashes with a noise that bounces between the banks
of the headlands, and echoes far out into the salt sea. Such
was the roaring sound of Trojan warriors inundating
the protectors of good Patroclus. From all sides they came
with their screeching cries.

And at first at any rate the Trojans came on strong, and forced
the jostling Argives back, even the quick-thinking, sharp-sighted
Argives, thereby exposing Patroclus' corpse on the ground.

Not one Trojan, however bold, speared a single Achaean
during this initial advance, but some got a hand on the corpse.
But not for long. The Trojans planned to drag the body away,
but in their way stood Telamonian Ajax. Ajax, who turns
fortunes round in a second. Warriors who think themselves strong,
and attempt him, come to lie confidently dead at his feet.
Ajax, whose physical presence and monstrous killing-work
was second only to Achilles. But Achilles was not here,
not just now. So Ajax came on. Ajax scattered the enemy
away from the body of Patroclus, just as free-wheeling
youths in the forest get serious when a wild boar comes
charging at them; so, panicked, they flee up into the mountains.
Just so easily did Ajax scatter everyone away;
and all those men who a moment earlier had exulted
in the thought of dragging off Patroclus' body for great
reward, had instead dragged themselves off, and at double-quick speed.

But there was one, the courageous son of the noble Lethus of Pelasgia, who crept out of the catastrophic combat, grabbed hold of a foot of Patroclus, tied his leather sword-belt securely round the cold ankles, and attempted to drag off the body into the Trojan lines. Bad idea. Hippothous was his name. As he tugged at the body he imagined all the favour he'd win from Hector, all the glory from the Trojans; instead, death came quick to him. And not a single man there could have stopped it from happening, no matter how committed the effort. For Ajax came down onto him from out of the cloud of dust and war, and eye to eye he thrust his spear through his face, then quickly severed off the top of the head by the horsehair plume socket, and a thin rill of blood jetted out from the socket-stub, even as the man's brains gushed out when Ajax pulled his spear back from the wounded face. So therewith was the strong hand and fury of Ajax. Just there the would-be hero fell dead by the body of Patroclus; his head hit the dirt by the body's cold feet, far from his homeland of Larissa of the beautiful plains. Dead by Ajax's hand, the man will have no chance now to repay his parents' commitment of rearing him with any glory of any kind. Their son died a pathetic death. Now who was next?

Then Hector hurled his shining spear at Ajax. So the spear came flying in out of the dust, and Ajax avoided it by the smallest of margins. But the spear hit Schedius, son of great-hearted Iphitus, who reigned as king and master over many men in world-famous Panopeus. Alas, his son now staggered among the corpses on the plain by the river Scamander; he was far the best of the Phocians, but Hector's spear ripped through his shoulder and severed the collar bone on its way

out of the body. So he fell with a rattle, and breathed in dust, and died.

Then war-loving Trojan Phorcys, Phaenops' son, came forward to defend the body of Hippothous. And Ajax, with his fist of massive proportions, punched through Phorcys' flimsy armour and tore deep into him and pulled his stomach clean out of his body, all bloodied and dripping. Unhappy Phorcys fell in the dust, and embraced mother earth with his arms, and died; and Ajax tossed his stomach down onto him, kindly restoring his parts, in a way. Kindness, however, didn't extend to armour; so the Argives captured the corpses, both Hippothous and Phorcys, and dragged them away, as Hector himself drew back, giving mighty Ajax room, and himself more space to move, and options against him.

Hero Aeneas, meanwhile, fighting his own fierce battles nearby, saw his Trojan army faltering, and filled with dread. Before his eyes flashed the image of the entire Trojan force shoved against the high city walls, then obliterated in their weakness. This Trojan War has been an education into the mind of Zeus, who does whatever he wants, and whose intentions cannot be anticipated, nor understood. One moment he favours the Trojans; then the next, the Argives!

So Aeneas thought to himself :

*"How do we defend against the will of a god?
If Zeus wants Troy razed, what can we do about it?
Yet I've heard of men whose strength overcame even
Zeus' command, and saved their city, and people.
What wins victories is smart and relentless attack.*

So have confidence in yourself and keep fighting!"

So thought Aeneas, who then called out to Hector, saying :

"Hector, we must fight harder! We may be fighting more than just men! We must push back against the gods, and make the Argives sorry to carry their dead Patroclus back to their ships! You hold Ajax, and I'll take everyone else!"

And before Aeneas had even finished speaking, his spear tore through the warrior Leocritus, son of Arisbas, and good friend of noble Lycomedes. And Lycomedes saw his friend fall, and in answer thrust his spear through the heart of Amythaon, Hippasus' son out of fertile Paeonia, and now out of it for good. So now Asteropaeus moved up to leader of the Paeonians. He leapt over the body and charged at the Argives, attempting to get to the body of Patroclus; but the Argives stood firm, with shields raised in tight formation round their fallen hero, and with their shining spears raised, too. So Asteropaeus had no luck, and his attack came to nothing. And Ajax's orders had been followed : to keep position by the body no matter what, and leave the rest of the fighting to the rest of the warriors. This Ajax had said to them, thus they were doing so, and that spot of fertile earth turned into a miasma of dark blood, as man after man fell in the dirt, both Trojans and Argives; for these heroes fighting round Patroclus couldn't avert all harm; a few of them fell in the fight, but not many, as one man defended the next man amid the congested slaughter.

So like a living body of fire the armies spread across

the plain. And the dust they raised was as sooty smoke gathering round them. Bright blue sky shone overhead, but within the darkness they couldn't see the sunshine outside, or breathe the fresh air there. The men fought inside the shadowy cloud, where nothing looked clear.

Within the dark dust, order collapsed again. Combat splintered here and there into separate clusters of fighting; but the central point remained the dead Patroclus, who wasn't having a good time of it, as both armies were dragging the corpse, first one way, then another, as both fought for possession of the body.

Just as a master gives to his servants a freshly stripped hide of a great bull for stretching, and they stand in a circle here and there around it, and take hold of it, and a drenching of fat drips from the hide as the people stretch it to the limit of strain, just so was good Patroclus' bloody body tugged at every which way while warriors struggled in the tight space for the right of ownership for what was left of Patroclus, who, when living, was beautiful to see, but now looked ruinous.

Steadily they struggled and suffered in the gathering dust, taking no time to rest, except for a recovery breath or two. Just now, even the best of them were feeling the strain of the long-stretched combat; and the dust clung to the sweat that ran down their bodies along their armoured legs to their feet scuffling in the blood-red dirt. Now their arms felt heavy, and their eyes stung; but the fight kept intensifying, especially round Patroclus, whose death had not yet raced from mouth to mouth through the ranks of men.

Two such warriors were Thrasymedes and Antilochus. These Argive heroes assumed the excellent friend of Achilles

was still hacking his way through the front lines. The two were fighting in one of the far-off clusters, sent out from guarding the ships by Nestor, who had recognized the need for reinforcements. None of them had any idea just how wild was the fighting round Patroclus, as the Trojans there were invigorated by the promise of riches, while the Achaeans had their honour to preserve; and neither Ἄρης nor Athena would have laughed at the pressure of rage gathering strong at that gory spot.

Such was the chaos that Zeus Orderer looked down on and saw, allowing such strainful riot for reasons unfathomable, bringing pain and grief and suffering to both men and horses, and even contributing additional horrors over Patroclus' corpse, curiously encouraging efforts best left unspoken.

Achilles, meanwhile, far back at the precious ships, also had no knowledge of the fate of his friend. And δῖος Achilles would never have dreamt that good Patroclus was gone forever, but expected him back with him any time now, for both had agreed that Patroclus would turn away from the city gates once he had fought his way forward to that victorious point. In fact, Achilles now reflected on things that his goddess mother Thetis of the seawaves had more than once confided to him, when she had come to him from the side of Zeus. She had never said to Achilles, in all of those confidences, that beautiful Patroclus was not to return at any time ever again. This she had chosen to keep to herself.

So with every passing moment Achilles grew ever-more concerned why his dear friend had not returned to him,

not knowing of the heated battle round the corpse,
 where the warriors were pressing on one another with sharp-
 edged weapons unceasingly, seeking to take each other's life.

Out there in the combat one of the bronze-armoured Achaeans
 would turn to the next and say :

*"Hey, friends, this is it! No matter what, forget the ships!
 If we turn around, let us fall into our graves, and never
 get back to the ships! That would be far better than losing
 Patroclus to the Trojans! They'll parade him through the city
 and win all the glory!"*

And in a similar way a bronze-armoured Trojan would turn
 to the next and say :

*"Friends! If fate would have us all dead here and now, ourselves and them,
 then that's what we're doing, and that's that! We shall not retreat!"*

Out there in the combat thus one spoke to the next, encouraging
 one another. Man fought man : with spear, sword, stone, hand, whatever.

And amid the unwearying noise the corpse faced the air up
 to heaven. And his horses, Patroclus' immortal horses,
 a gift from friend Achilles, stood on the sidelines of battle
 and refused to budge any further, but lowered their heads down
 to touch the earth. Their driver, Automedon, snapped the whip,
 and touched them lightly with the lashing tip, but they would not move.
 Tears were falling from their eyes, for they had seen their master
 unmoving on the ground, and they knew he would no longer be
 with them. So they bowed their heads to the dust, where Patroclus was,

and wept.

And bold Automedon used threats, then revilings, then sweet-nothings; and he even struck them with force with the stinging whip; but the horses were minded neither to go back to the ships, nor back along the rushing strait of the Hellespont and home, nor were they inclined to return into the battle with the Achaeans. The two immortal horses simply stood there like a monument enduring upright at a tomb of a dead man or woman. They stood there at Patroclus' beautiful chariot, and their bowed heads left tears on the ground.

Zeus looked down from above and saw the two yoked horses mourning. Their streaming manes were soiled, and he saw their tears for their dead master, and he thought :

"Aw, you poor things. Why did I give you to Peleus, a man, to suffer down there in that miserable place among men? For there is nothing more miserable than to be among men, and women, down there. But if Hector thinks he might step up onto that chariot, he's mistaken. So come now, horses! I shall put in your heart and in your knees wondrous strength, so you might bring Automedon to Achilles."

Thus spoke Zeus, who then sent powerful inspirations of spirit down into the hearts and minds and legs of the two marvellous horses. So the pair shook their heads, sending the dust from their manes down onto the ground by their massive hoofs. Then they leapt forward in a gallop that left their charioteer Automedon gripping the rim for support, and entered the field of battle. In this way good Patroclus' chariot rushed back into

the fray, as the immortal horses of Achilles, galloping
with colossal strides, joined the fighting Trojans and Achaeans.

And Automedon, occupying the chariot-box behind
them, raised his spear and fought, though the death of Patroclus troubled
his soul. His grief made him stronger. So he attacked the Trojans
on his way back to the ships, and felled many a warrior
with his spear as he swooped in like a vulture attacking geese,
taking them one by one before they even knew what was what.

But the horses kept increasing in power, the beautiful
immortal horses of Zeus, and finally Automedon
realized he had to drop his spear and grab the reins, or expect
to tumble out of the chariot-box! Never had these horses
required so much of his strength to steer them. Never had they
run so magnificently. So with reins in hand Automedon
coaxed the horses to slow the pace, so he might remain upright
and inside the chariot-box, and not tumbled out onto
the dirt, where he would be an easy prey for the enemy.

And as he slowed down a friend rolled up beside him in his own
chariot, even Alcimedon, son of Laerces, who
was Haemon's son. And he spoke out to Automedon, saying :

"Automedon! What god has stolen your wits? Have you no mind?
What are you doing here, fighting the best fighters they have
on your own, with no warrior to wield the spear beside you?"

Then answered Automedon, son of Diores :

"Payback," he said. "Alcimedon, Patroclus is dead. One of

the smartest of us all, is gone. He could hold these fierce horses and kill with the spear at once, when he was beside me. But Fate is Death, and in answer to everything I am taking many lives.”

And Alcimedon answered Automedon, saying :

“Then step aside! I’m coming to join you!”

And as their chariots moved side by side
Alcimedon jumped from one to the other.
Then he took the shining reins in his hands,
and the whip; and Automedon raised bronze.

During this, δῖος Hector saw them break through the swirling dust,
coming toward the fighting raging round the valuable corpse;
and he turned to Aeneas, who was fighting nearby, and spoke :

“Aeneas! Look at that coming at us! That’s dead Patroclus’
chariot pulled by Achilles’ very-pissed-off horses!
But the men look weak and tiny behind them. I’ll take them myself,
both of them. But if you assist me we’ll kill them faster.”

So he spoke, and Aeneas agreed. And while they waited
for the chariot to come, two godlike Trojan warriors
came to them, and stood behind them : Chromius and Aretus.
And the hearts of these men were intent on killing the Argives
coming at them. And they saw the horses with their proud heads raised
high, and hoped to drive them off and away. Imbeciles! These
paltry two were going to move immortal horses of Zeus?
Instead, in the coming fight there was destined to be bloodshed.

Automedon, meanwhile, prayed to Zeus Father to give him courage, and fill his dark heart with a power unstoppable. And then he turned to Alcimedon and had him stay the horses.

So the two immortal horses of Zeus slowly, reluctantly, came to a stop, returned now to the body of their lost master. The sad sight of Patroclus in the dust hurt their hearts. But Automedon's hurt was overmastered by his lust for revenge. He saw Hector and Aeneas standing together before him. And so he spoke to Alcimedon, saying :

"I shall step down now. You stay where you are, and keep the horses where I can feel their breath on my back. For I know what that son of Priam is thinking. He wants to reach out his hand and take these horses and stroke their beautiful manes. That would be after he's killed the two of us. Then who knows what."

So spoke Automedon, and his driver assented to this.

Automedon, then, stepped down out of the chariot, and came to a stand by the horses, who weren't panting, so godly they were; and he looked into the Argive forces fighting round the body of his friend, and called out into the dim and swirling dust, saying :

"You mighty Ajaxes! Mighty Menelaus! Come now to me! Just now, leave the body for our other brave ones to protect! For this is it, right here! I'm facing the two best men they have!"

So shouted Automedon, who looked into the face

of Hector, and then into the face of Aeneas. These two, meanwhile, started their charge, their shields draped over their shoulders, dry, solid, and thick-layered, and with abundant bronze welded on. So, Automedon gripped his spear and made ready to throw it, knowing that the outcome of all this was already decided a long time ago.

So Automedon poised himself, drew back his long death-bringing spear, and let fly. He watched it streak through the air. And Aretus held his well-made shield firmly before him with sure hand and arm : but the spear-point broke through, and passed through his metal-plated sword-belt, and penetrated his belly. And he fell to the ground and writhed there in agony. The sight of him brings to the mind the times when a man on the farmyard takes a freshly sharpened axe and strikes an ox behind its horns, and cuts down deep inside : and the ox lurches forward and sinks to the ground : just like that did Aretus lurch and fall, bringing with him the spear sticking in his bowels : his limbs, now spread on the earth, loose, and quivering.

Then Hector cast his spear at Automedon, from twelve paces away, but he saw the spear coming, and ducked his head, and it slipped past him so close he heard it pass by. Just barely had he escaped certain death, which now fixed itself in the earth, and wobbled there, a failed attempt, till Ἄρης , disgusted, stopped its action.

Now Hector drew his sword and meant to rush him, but then stopped cold. He saw Telamonian Ajax coming his way. And if that wasn't enough, the son of Oïleus walked beside him. Hector, thinking fast, and knowing first-hand of Ajax's strength, decided to fall back and muster more men for an attack. So he gave a signal, and both Aeneas and Chromius

backed off with him; but δῖος Hector intended to return.

Aretus, meanwhile, writhed in the dirt where he lay, left there to die, for that was how it had to be, and how it had been written. So Automedon bent down and began removing the armour of the dying man, and he spoke to him, saying :

“You will be my satisfaction for Patroclus’ death—for now. Though the man I killed is a little nothing of a person.”

And so Automedon rose to his feet with the bloody spoils in his hands and tossed everything into the chariot-box. Then he, too, got in, and his bloody hands took the shining reins, dripping like the teeth of a lion that had gnawed at a bull. He snapped the whip, and the horses broke into a fast gallop, the wondrous, unforgettable horses that would take him back to Achilles.

And so behind Automedon the battle for the dead body of Patroclus raged on and on, awful and horrifying, with men carved by blades into many appalling sights, and pierced with spears through soft and bloody parts, and brought down every which way. And so it went on, and the prize of all this, Patroclus himself, lay heedless.

And goddess Athena the Bright-Eyed looked down at the plain, and stepped down from Heaven, and went in among the Achaeans, to encourage them. For Zeus Everything had watched amused when heroic Hector retreated from Ajax; so with perverse humour, or with who knows what (for who living or dead can say why things abide as they are?), Zeus Orderer now decreed that

Hector's army was to suffer.

So a dark-gleaming rainbow shone so bright in the clear blue sky
that its colours burned through the dust, and every man on the plain
fought with a bloodlust till now unimaginable to them.

And Athena came close and whispered in Menelaus' ear,
saying :

*"This is the moment to act, or forever after suffer
the consequences. You must not let Patroclus' body
be left for the dogs of Troy to rip apart and devour.
This cannot happen to the dearest friend of Achilles.
Keep position, and encourage your men to obliterate
the wall of Trojans around you."*

And then at this Menelaus himself whispered a prayer,
saying :

*"Athena, allow my strength to hold against the oncoming
enemy. Keep me upright before their spears and arrows.
Then I should stay by the side of the fallen Patroclus,
and bring care to the body, for his death has eaten into
my heart, and the pain won't leave me. Yet Zeus
gives Hector the fury of fire, and he rages wildly
through us, and God would have the victory be his."*

This Menelaus whispered to himself, and Athena Bright-
Eyed smiled that he had made prayer first and foremost to her.
So she enriched his body with strength, his shoulders and knees,
and in his heart she set the boldness of the fly that will not quit.

The fly buzzes and buzzes round the skin of a man, and bites
 and bites, and abides the swatting away with the hands, as blood
 is so sweet to the taste. Just such a persistent daring did
 Athena place in the dark-gleaming spirit of Menelaus.
 So he held position by the fallen hero Patroclus,
 and in an intoxication of rage he cast his bright spear.

Now one of the Trojans fighting for the body was Podes,
 son of Etion, a wealthy man, and well-liked by all;
 and his son was a rarity among the people, someone
 Hector could trust without question, and so was a frequent guest
 at Hector's feasts, and the two were close friends, and comrades in war—

but Menelaus' spear-point broke through his warrior's belt,
 its reinforcing metal plates useless now. Podes grabbed at
 the ashwood spear-shaft stuck inside him, a slender seven-foot-
 long pole : and then he fell to the ground with a rattle, and died.
 Menelaus then waved his hand, and a comrade dragged Podes
 off and away into the massed Achaean forces.

Meanwhile, amid the Trojans, Apollo came to Hector.
 Hovering close, he whispered in his ear, saying :

*"Hector, will there ever be another man who fears you,
 if you shrink back from Menelaus, who before this was known
 as a cowardly warrior? Look what this coward has done!"*

And Hector saw his close friend Podes sprawled out in the dust, dead.

Hector filled with distress and grief and rage, and his heart beating
 inside him was as the swirling dust-cloud. And so he attacked,

his shining bronze armour streaking up to the enemy's eye.

And far overhead everything, Zeus Father raised the aegis,
emblem of power fringed with glittering tassels of diamond
wire. Then deep-grey storm-clouds rushed into the sky, shrouding
Ida's peaks, and he hurled lightnings that made cracks in the earth,
and the stone world trembled with sounds of thunder. And Zeus Father
gave the Trojans new strength to press forward against the Argives.

First to fall of the Achaeans as the Trojans forced their way
forward toward Patroclus was a leader of the Boeotians,
Peneleos. He had never failed but to fight at the front,
but now he was sent out of the field with a wounded shoulder.
A spear thrown by someone had incised a bloody scratch there,
then wild-fighting Polydamas had leapt in with his sword,
and with one hammer-blow deepened the scratch all the way
to the bone. Polydamas sprung away to wound the next man,
and Peneleos returned to the ships, passing by Hector
grappling with Leitus in close combat. Leitus' two hands
fluttered around his body as he sought to ward off the blows
from Hector's fists : then Hector drew sword. Leitus' eyes grew wide,
but he still didn't see the strike come to him, so quick it was.
But the wound he received seemed trifling. Yet this smallest of wounds
on his wrist left Leitus unable to brandish a weapon;
and Hector smiled at his little victory, and left Leitus
alone after that. So Leitus, great-hearted Alectryon's son,
had to sheepishly withdraw from the battlefield, scurrying
in fear on his way to the ships, for his right hand was useless.

And while Hector was smiling, a tremendous spear struck
him in the chest, thrown from the hand of mighty Idomeneus.

The spear-point bounced off Hector's breast-plate and the shaft shattered into pieces, and all Trojan fighters nearby shouted in inextinguishable fury.

A Trojan then tossed Hector a spear, and the moment he caught it, Hector cast it at Idomeneus, who was coming straight for him in a chariot; but the driver turned the horses, and took the spear himself, even Coeranus, close friend of the bloodthirsty one Meriones, whom Coeranus had followed out of the city of Lyctus to come to war.

Just moments before, Coeranus had seen mighty hero Idomeneus on foot, and invited him into the chariot-box. So when the spear came in, which would have unhappily given Hector the victory, Coeranus knew what he had to do.

The warrior made the ultimate sacrifice for the good of the army, and fell at the hands of Hector Man-Killer. The spear shattered his face, and let no more be said about it.

So he tumbled backwards out of the chariot. And before even Idomeneus knew what was what, Meriones had leapt into the chariot-box beside him, grabbed the reins, and turned the sleek-muscled horses round. And he said to his friend :

"Whip the horses all the way to the ships! We need more armour, more men, and more weapons. How can fortunes keep changing so quickly? What is going on?"

To this Idomeneus could offer no answer. So they rushed off the field of battle, with fear falling on their hearts.

Ajax, too, as he laboured in fight, thought Father Zeus the cause
of the Achaean failure, and in a pause between killings
he spoke to Menelaus, and said :

“ὦ πόποι ! His corpse keeps rising in price! Even an idiot
can see that Zeus is helping the Trojans! We’re backed up almost
to the body—and then what? They’ll swamp us, just as these arrows
shower in on us! Look at this they’re doing! All their spears
hit us and take us down, no matter if thrown at us by good
man or weakling! Zeus at any rate forwards them into us!
But somehow every spear we throw falls stupidly to the earth!
Come now! You and I must devise something better than this!
Otherwise we’re not leaving with Patroclus, if we leave at all!
The faces of our men tell it plain to us : they don’t think
we’re leaving here. What the hell! They’ll flood us, grab the body,
and charge the ships again? No way is crazy Hector getting
to the ships again! Not while I’m alive. But this is it
and no more funny business—someone go get Achilles now!
Send a messenger with the news I think he has not heard yet.
But I can’t see anyone clearly in this goddamn dust! Can you?
I can’t tell a man from a horse!”

So spoke Ajax, who then prayed to Zeus :

*“Father, bring us out of darkness, and into fresh air and sky.
Allow us to see clearly. Cut us down in the light of the sun,
at least—since you’re so clearly gratified with killing us!”*

And the sky looked down and saw tears pouring from Ajax’s eyes.

Then the clouds parted, as Zeus swept his palms outward,

and pushed back the gloom; and the sun shone, clear and bright,
 over all heads, enlightening the entire Scamander.
 And now the combat was fully revealed to the sight of all.

Ajax then spoke :

“Menelaus,” he said, “go look and see if Antilochus,
 Nestor’s son, still lives. If he does, let him go quickly
 to Achilles, to tell him his dearest friend is dead.”

This Ajax said, and Menelaus left without a word.

The son of Atreus carved his way through the enemy, looking
 for Antilochus. All the while his army was being
 routed by the Trojans, as if Zeus held a personal grudge
 against the sons of Atreus, for some reason or other.

The Achaean army was like a quarrelsome lion
 at the threshold of a farmyard, abiding in his spot
 all the night through, loath to enter and take the best
 prize, for barking dogs irritate him, and men throw
 this and that at him; and yet for all that the lion
 finally attacks, its craving for fresh flesh overcoming
 all else : but then come the dogs, and the men
 throwing numerous items including twig-parcels on fire :
 so finally the lion slinks off and away, still hungry,
 and abashed. This thought ran through Menelaus’ mind,
 and it left him fearing for his life, as he went on his way.

But then Menelaus thought of the kind-hearted Patroclus,
 now miserably dead. While he lived he was amiable

to all, a good man; but death and fate found him; and the Argives would not let him pass into the hands of the Trojans.

So Menelaus rushed on, his eyes searching round tirelessly, just as an eagle, no matter the height of its altitude, spots the rabbit hidden under a bush, and swoops in and plucks it off and away, off the ground and out of life. (The eagle, men say, has the sharpest eyesight of all wingéd creatures far and wide under heaven.) Just so did Menelaus rove through the clashing bodies at war, his sharp eyesight scanning for the noble son of Nestor, Antilochus. Whether from luck or destiny (if there is such a difference), Antilochus was alive. Menelaus found him harrying the left flank of the field, encouraging his men to boost the enemy body count at their feet.

So Menelaus came to him and spoke, saying :

“Antilochus! Listen now to news that will stop your heart cold. I wish I didn’t have to say this, but Patroclus is dead. With your own eyes you see what God is doing to us. He’s rolling ruin over us, and now victory seems lost. Morale is low, not just here but all over. Just imagine the fight going on round good Patroclus’ body! Ajax is there—but so is Hector and his men. These are your orders : run double-quick to Achilles and bring news of what I’ve said. And tell him one more thing : the dead man is naked, for Hector has robbed him of his armour and now wears it himself.”

Thus spoke Menelaus, and Antilochus looked horror-struck at the sound of the words. For a long while he searched for words

of his own, as his eyes poured out tears, but his voice couldn't break through his hard breathing. And his heart wasn't cold, but beat faster in his chest. But fastest of all was his feet when he left the field in a run, bearing terrible news for the son of Peleus, Achilles.

But Menelaus—when Antilochus left, you did not take his place among the cluster of Pylians struggling under the weight of the Trojan onslaught there. And Antilochus' men desperately missed their greatest warrior's prowess.

But, as Menelaus rushed back toward the body of hero warrior Patroclus, he found powerful Thrasymedes along the way, and sent him to help the Pylian fighters.

So Menelaus returned to find the two Ajaxes backed up to the body. So he immediately spoke, saying :

"You men! Obviously we can't wait for Achilles to make up his mind! Whatever the hell we're going to do, we do it now! Or they'll be carrying out all of us, lost to death and fate. Hector's brought them to us almost to our noses! How do we get around death and fate? Any goddamn ideas, Ajax?"

And mighty Telamonian Ajax answered him, saying :

"Death and fate can go fuck themselves. You, though—and bring Meriones—get under the body and lift it up. Walk behind me. Just stay behind me. We're taking him out. All the men together with me will cut a passage for you. It is as it is, like the old days. For good or bad, we're side

by side, all the men, and that is that. We live or die together.
Just bring me Hector crazy man.”

So spoke Ajax; and Menelaus saw overwhelming strength
coming from his eyes, so only nodded in reply; then turned
away and got to work. He and the others lifted the dead
Patroclus up from the earth; and the Trojans, when they saw this,
let out a signal cry that cut to the eardrum, and they rushed
the Achaeans. From all sides they came in toward the dead body.

But as it happened the Trojans were like the dogs that hunters
send to the wounded boar in the forest, to deliver their killing
teeth. But while they come with salivating jaws, whenever
the boar wheels round, flaring with courage, then the dogs back away,
now this way, now that, too scared to come closer.

Just so, the Trojans charged in squads of well-armed men,
wielding sharp swords and double-pointed spears,
but when the two Ajaxes had finished with them,
there was no more squad because there were no more men :
and all the other Trojans saw, and their faces lost all their
colour, and finally no one dared come close to the body,
as the Achaeans moved with it across the Scamander plain.

Still and all, taking the body off didn't go easily,
because Hector and Aeneas were still on the battlefield.
But these two didn't attack Ajax or those he defended.
They attacked all other Achaeans instead. They rushed up
on one after another, and brought death to many.

The battle blazed over the plain as ferocious as a wild-

fire rushing to a city and its people, having sprung up without warning; it rears up high, and sets buildings blazing; and many houses topple under the blinding flames, while the roaring wind hastens it on. Even so against one another came chariots and spearmen and arrows and confused death.

But the men hauling the body of Patroclus through all this moved adamant as the mules who carry from the mountain-side a great bearing-beam, the foundation of a house; or stacks of planking for seaships; and though their hearts are sorely distressed as step by step they labour down a rugged pathway, still they persist forward, and hold their weight. Just so the men held the body.

And finally these men broke out in front of the Trojan lines, and saw their trench and the precious ships up ahead.

The two Ajaxes were positioned behind them now, holding off the Trojan onslaught, just as a headland pushes the waves back; or how a wooded ridge, stretching far out into flatland, diverts the rushing currents of oncoming rivers, no matter the strength of those streams—the overflow can't break through. Like that the two Ajaxes baffled every Trojan attack.

Following close behind them, however, haunting their every step, were Aeneas, Anchises' son, and hard-glinting Hector.

And just as a blue sky filled with starlings or jackdaws breaks out suddenly in shrieking cries of murder when a hawk swoops in, bringing death to little birds; so as Aeneas and Hector advanced, so the sons of the Achaeans withdrew before them, suddenly sober after the intoxication of battle,

and now shouting shrill warnings to the others. Could it be true?

Were the Achaeans back at the trench? Would this war have no end?

End of Bk XVII

Book XVIII

Strife swept the plain like blazing fire; while Antilochus, rushing out of it with quick-moving feet, ran to Achilles with terrible news to deliver. Up ahead he saw ships with high-pointed ends, the powerful Myrmidonian ships; and Achilles, standing by those ships, saw Antilochus come, and felt a shadow of cold desolation cover his heart, for somehow he already knew of the message arriving.

Thus, troubled at heart, he spoke to his own titanic spirit :

“Patroclus is dead. Lost angel of a ruined Paradise!
He is not dead! Why are the long-haired Achaeans fighting down here again? Looking confused, amazed, and fighting in terror? You gods, don’t let it be so.
Don’t give my heart invulnerable grief. I feel trembling, I, Achilles! My mother did say to me some of the best of the Myrmidons would not come back from Troy, but fall into the darkness here, never again to see light.
Patroclus is dead. Peace! He is not yet dead. I have not yet heard it said to me. Ah, Patroclus! Did you not listen to me? I told you to return to me, and not face Hector!
Now here comes Antilochus out of the fire, to tell me.”

So as the mind of Achilles verberated with hard thought, Antilochus rushed up with tears streaming from his eyes, and delivered the terrible news :

“Achilles! Son of wise-hearted Peleus, I bring heavy words. Patroclus is dead. We’re fighting for possession

of the body right now—his naked body! Hector's stripped him, and the crazy man-killer's now wearing some of the armour."

So he spoke, and Achilles answered him :

"What is it you say?" he asked in a whisper. "Cruel words! There shall be no more words! I extinguish all words!"

A terrible dark cloud of anguish overcame Achilles. He sank to the ground onto his knees, as a gargantuan howl began growing inside him. Behind clenched teeth he tore off his armour, flinging it every which way; also seizing dust from the earth with his hands, and flinging it into his face; and as the ash-dark dust showered down on his beautiful head he howled in an ugly way while the earth blackened his tunic. So, dropped in the depth of his grief, he lay stretched out in the dust, an awful magnitude; and he tore wildly at his hair.

And all of the handmaidens that Achilles and Patroclus had plundered (from one city or another) came rushing from his tent, and saw their master debased in the dirt; and each shrieked a terrible sound of grief. They then surrounded him in a circle, watching in horror, and pounding their breasts with their fists. Touched at heart at the pitiful sight of unfathomable suffering, they weakened; and they wept with wailings and lamentings.

Then unhappy Antilochus saw him reach for his dagger, as if he might cut his own throat then and there; so he dropped to the ground, and took both hands of Achilles into his own; and the two of them turned the earth damp with their tears.

Far off the seawaves heard their woe. Down in the watery deep,
 in a glittering cave, she heard him, the mother of Achilles,
 silvery Thetis of the seawaves. At the sorrowful sound
 she shrieked, and all the sea-goddesses gathered round her,
 all the daughters of Nereus, her father, old man of the sea.

To Thetis came Glauce τε Thaleia τε Cymodoce
 τε Nesaea τε Speio τε Thoë τε gentle-eyed Halië,
 καὶ Cymothoë τε καὶ Actaeä καὶ Limnoreia,
 καὶ Melite καὶ Iara καὶ Amphithoe τε καὶ
 Agave, καὶ Doto τε Proto τε Pherousa τε καὶ
 Dynamene τε Dexamene, τε καὶ Amphinone
 καὶ Callianeira, καὶ Doris καὶ Pynope, καὶ glorious
 Galatea, καὶ Nemertes, τε καὶ Apseudes, καὶ Callianassa :
 also Clymene τε Ianeira τε καὶ Ianassa,
 καὶ Maera καὶ Orithyia καὶ fair-haired Amatheia :
 and in the misty depths of the sea other Nereids came
 to the shining silver cave, and all struck their breasts in terror,
 and sea-goddess Thetis was leader of their lamentation :

*“O my friends! Now hear sung a joyless ode.
 (When sadness moves as music, such solace
 brings consolement, though but lightly, to woe.)
 Ah, how luckless, to bring to birth a son
 heroic and good, for the world crushes
 such men! O my sisters, maids of the deep,
 I raised an excellent child into a man.
 As a little sapling grows to a tree,
 so my warrior son rose to promise.*

But after I nurtured my son, just as

*a tree grows tall in a rich garden plot—
then my strong son went off to Troy and war.*

*Never again shall I welcome him home
to the flourishing house of Peleus.
And although he lives yet under the light
of the sun, he grieves, and suffers his one
life away. But I am helpless to fix
his woes, for Zeus is supreme in all things,
and decides what will be, and what will not.*

*I go now to Achilles. I go now
to my son, that I may see him, and he me,
and share what solace we two may find together.*

*I must go now to learn what I must hear :
what has hurt him in that terrible war.”*

Thus spoke Thetis. She then left the glittering cave, rose
up through the depths, and broke the surface of the sea, into air
and sunlight; and all the nymphs followed her in tears.

When they came to the fertile land of the city of Troy,
they stepped up onto the beach; then together they went
through the finely-organised lines of black ships propped on the sand;
until finally they came to Achilles. Then his mother came close,
and she listened to his heavy sighs, and added her own to his,
and then she cried out at the sky and it filled the air entire.
Then she lowered her voice, and spoke through tears to her fallen son :

“O child, why these tears? What hurts? Speak it out to me and hide

nothing. *What you have wished for has come true, has it not?* You raised your hands to heaven, and prayed to Zeus for all Achaeans to suffer by their ships, cowering close together, desperate for your help, while suffering horrid things. And I see all these things now.”

Then, sighing heavily, Achilles answered her :

“All that I prayed for has been answered, but I take no pleasure in it, for my dearest friend Patroclus is gone. Patroclus, whom I loved above all others, and valued equal to myself, has fallen to my answered prayers. He is lost to me now. And Hector, crazy Hector, stripped the body of its armour, and now walks in it. Mother, you know that armour. Sacred pieces that the gods gave to Peleus as a gift of respect, on the day they lowered you into bed beside him, my father, a man.

If only you’d never come up from under, but stayed with your sisters, and my father had found a woman of flesh and blood to marry! Then maybe I would never have been born as I am.

As it is, this heavy grief, this measureless, infinite grief, is soon to be yours, too, when you lose your son. I am not coming back from here. You will never receive me at your home again. Regardless of the prophecy you and I both know, I don’t want to live anyway, not in any society of men, even if I destroy Hector, body and soul, down to dust, and get my revenge for the death of Patroclus.”

Then sea-goddess Thetis answered him through her tears :

“It is just as you say, my son. If you stay here,

there is nothing at the end of the war for you
but death. And it will come quickly. For soon after
Hector's death it's fated that your death be ready."

Achilles heard this, swirling with grief and rage, and answered out :

"Gods, have mercy on me, and bring my death quick! For I was not
there to stay the hand that killed my friend. Far from home he fell
and died, and needed me at his side to beat back nasty fate.
So, since there'll be no return to my own beloved homeland,
and since I produced here nothing to remember with honour
—neither saved my friend nor any other of the Achaeans,
all those many warriors brought down by madman Hector—
then let me remain here by my ships, and end as I began
here, a useless burden to the earth. I, sitting? He who has
no rival on the battlefield? (Others, though, do excel me
in the quiet of strategy sessions.) If only war itself
be undone and lost! In gods and in men, no matter how wise
one might be, anger may fall like sweet honey drop by drop
on the heart, until unmanageable rage becomes sweeter
than honey. One drop, as a small fire at the hearth will fill
all the house with smoke. Such was the rage that grew inside me
at the acts of commander of men Agamemnon. But all that
is over now. So be it. I won't allow it to continue,
because I can't. I must tame my own crazy heart, if I am
to avenge the destruction of my closest friend,
and go forth and find his murderer, even Hector himself.
As for my own fate, I'll take it when it comes, whenever Zeus
wills it, or any of the other gods : and that is how it is.

Not even celebrated 'invincible' Hercules escaped

death—though beloved of Zeus, so they say. Fate overmastered him, along with the terrible anger of the queen of heaven. Since a similar fate is prepared for me, soon I shall lie as low as he, the once-invincible Hercules. The gods do as they do, and will bring me as low as they desire.

But just now I have time for my glorious revenge. Let all their desirable women—Trojan, Dardanian, whoever—wipe away the tears from their cheeks with both hands. I will bring them an occasion for sighs! Let all come to know I've restrained myself for so long from battle that no one will stop me. You, too, mother. For all your love, don't even try. No words will stop me now."

Then wavy-haired goddess Thetis answered her son, saying :

"Very well. It will be as you say; you and I know the truth. My kind son. What an honourable thing it is to defend your friends from ruin! They need you now; they're weary and distressed, fighting what they think is a lost cause. It won't be—not when you step out there in your fresh-made glittering armour. What you brought here with you, all that bronze beauty, is cursed now. Some the Trojans hold, with Hector mocking us by wearing pieces on his shoulders, and wherever else; and the rest you've thrown in the dust, to lie there forevermore untouched. So then, my lovely Achilles, stay away from Ἄργος until I disappear and then return, and you see me coming with marvellous armour for your skin. Tomorrow, at first light, I shall return, with work from master-artist Hephaestus. Hector will then stop mocking us, I think, seeing that soon after he will be lying dead in the dust."

And Achilles, himself abased in the dust, answered her :

“Okay, mother,” is all he said.

And so Thetis turned away from her son. Being turned, she spoke to her sisters, the Nereid Nymphae of the sea, saying :

“Go now and walk into the waves of the sea, and go beneath, and swim down; while I rise to Olympus to see Hephaestus, master craftsman. I have hope he’ll give me armour for my son.”

Thus she spoke, and they straightaway went to the waves of the sea; while she, the wavy-haired goddess Thetis, moved through aeons to reach high Olympus, hoping to bring back shining armour. All the while she knew that the armour would soon be holy relics of her dear son.

So, away in her aerial flight, Thetis left behind her the clamorous shouting all round Hector Man-Killer, who once more roused his men to overtake Patroclus, and the fighting was fierce, in sight of the precious ships. Hector came on like fire and grabbed at the feet of the body, while Trojan spears and arrows flew in round him. He called out for the others, but the two Ajaxes grabbed at him, and hurled him out and away from the body. But Hector came on again, and again; so three times the Ajaxes were forced to beat him back and away; but crazy Hector, insane with confidence to carry off the mangled corpse, refused to entirely back away. Amid the clashing armies he stood screaming out a mighty shout of victory, a sign that meant he planned to come a fourth time for Patroclus’ body.

And the two Ajaxes looked to one another, just as two
herdsmen contemplate the hungry lion stalking their field,
knowing they may have no final defence. Could crazy Hector
actually take the body and win glory unimaginable?

Indeed, he might have, if not for swift wind-walking Iris,
who swept down from Olympus to the side of Achilles.
She whispered in his ear a plea to arm himself for battle.

(Iris, it would seem, had come secretly, without the knowledge
of Zeus, or the other gods; as Hera alone sent her forth.
Such an idea, however, of subterfuge is ludicrous
to think of, as Zeus alone ordains all things that come to be.)

“Rise,” said Iris, “son of Peleus, of all warriors the best!
Patroclus needs your help! He’s causing a great strife around him,
not far from these ships. Many men are dying in defence
of the corpse, and the Trojan killers keep on charging forward,
striving to carry away the body to high-reaching Troy!

Madman Hector fights with a single-minded purpose to get
the body, and take it away, and leave it impaled, headless,
on a stake by the Wall. So no more of this; rise up onto
your feet! Your love for Patroclus demands it! Imagine
the astonishment of your love becoming a lame plaything
for the dogs of Troy! Shame on you, if his body is disgraced!”

Then quick-thinking Achilles asked her :

“Iris goddess, which of the gods sent you to say this to me?”

And even quicker-moving Iris answered him :

“The Queen of Heaven,” she said, “and no one other.
She watches from the snowy heights of Olympus.”

Achilles then asked her :

“How am I supposed to fight? I can’t enter combat this way.
They hold my armour. Anyway my divine mother forbade me
entering the field wearing anything but the new-made armour
she’s to bring me from Hephaestus. Perhaps if I had use of
Telamonian Ajax’s shield—but even then, I was told
not to go. Anyhow, I’m sure Ajax is answering the best
they have with his weaponry, as they fight for the dear body.”

And again wind-walking Iris spoke to him, saying :

“Simply stand before them. Show yourself to the Trojans
just as you are, without weapons, without armour.
This alone should be enough to scare them away.
Combat may ease for a moment. All the weary
Argives will then have a moment to breathe.”

So she said, then stepped away, swift-moving Iris,
leaving him on his own. And Achilles, while Zeus smiled,
unloosed his fury from the hidden place inside his heart.
And Athena goddess of armour came close to him, she who
sustains war, and draped her diamond-glimmering aegis around
his mighty shoulders. And around his head she crowned him,
Ἰώ goddess, with fire : a golden radiance issued

from the man himself, a halo originating from his
body : just as dark smoke rises to heaven from a fire.

Imagine a small island city surrounded by enemies
besieging it. The men living there use smoke beacons by day,
and fire by night, to send messages over a distance,
signalling to people far away on the waves of the sea :
so all day long the antagonists clash in hateful battle,
and the fighting is held off far away from the city walls;
and at dusk, as the sun sets, both black smoke and bright fire
together are visible : even so was the light and darkness
intermixed in the visible heart of Achilles, and seen
in heaven.

So mighty Achilles walked from what was left of the Wall
to what was left of the trench, crossing that considerable
distance; and the Trojan army began to see him coming.
When he came to the trench with its palisades of lethal stakes,
he stopped. Then Achilles stood off on his own, away from both
Trojans and Achaeans, for he wisely obeyed his mother's
Word. So there where he stood he let out a colossal howl,
and woven into the sound was the voice of Athena,
and right then every Trojan felt terror indescribable.

Clear as the brassy war-trumpet when it blares out sharply
under the crush of life-destroying enemies surrounding
a city—just so clear a tone was the voice of Achilles;
and hearing this brazen call filled the enemy with dismay.
As it resounded through the air, their horses in fear stepped back,
and started to turn their chariots round, for in their mind's eye
they foreboded nothing good. And their charioteers were awe-

struck to see the unforgettable fire blazing round the head and body of δῖος Achilles; for Athena Bright-Eyes made him blaze. Three times Achilles howled fearfully over the trench, three times the enemy horses were confused and panicked, three times the celebrated Trojans shook in fear and awe. And in that desperate hour, twelve of their own men, twelve of the best Trojan warriors, were struck down by their own, when the chariots and the men turned to flee, and their spears on the way pierced their friends inadvertently, and their galloping horses flattened the bodies underfoot. Thus commotion reigned all up and down the Trojan lines.

Then, with great relief, the Achaeans carried Patroclus out of the battle; and down into the safety of their camp they brought the body, and lowered it onto a funeral bier. Around him all the men stood weeping. Then Achilles came close, and saw the body, the ruined body of dear Patroclus, his closest companion in life, companion in mind and age and heart, lifeless there on the bier. O sad hour! Achilles wept for the conquered Patroclus, whose years to come were all gone now. Achilles stared into the many wounds the bronze had made, and knew that it was he himself who had sent his friend onward into combat. Now never again would Patroclus return to him in joy and welcome. For no man comes back through the gates of death.

Then wide-eyed Queen Hera went to Helios, god of the sun, and sent him and his horses unwillingly on their way down the steep sky. Eminent in his airy luminosity, the sun unhappily stepped down before the appointed time, as he brought his shining chariot to the resting place beyond the western lands, and sank into the streams of Oceanus.

So the shadows of men grew long over the dust of the earth,
 as the rays of the sun levelled out; then Helios was gone,
 and darkness came. Then the Argives rested from cold-hearted war.

And the Trojan forces also withdrew from the battlefield,
 and returned to the sacred city of Troy. There, by the high
 surrounding wall, the warriors loosened their swift horses' necks
 from the chariot-yoke. Then the best men quickly gathered in
 assembly before even thinking of an evening meal.

In all the confusion and haste, no one wanted to be first
 to sit; so the full assembly stayed upright on its feet.
 Concern of Achilles had grown so great inside them that they
 visibly trembled before one another. For a long time
 he had remained out of the fight, but now he was here.

Among all the men of the assembly, wise Polydamas
 was celebrated as their foremost mind, the man who sees all
 sides of what he sees. He, the son of Panthous, was a close friend
 of Hector's, and, in fact, both had been born under the same stars :
 each in his own place, and apart : yet both in the same one night.
 And while the one man surpassed all in the spear, the other man
 prevailed in speech.

And so wise Polydamas now addressed the assembly,
 saying :

"Warriors, friends, hear me now tell you to consider both sides
 of the matter before us. Should we go into the city
 for the night, or not? I, for one, am for returning into
 the walls. Why should we await the morning all night on the plain?

For the moment our enemy is far from us;
 so I say we must conserve our energy now.
 But there is an even more important reason
 for retreat, which I will now explain to you.

As long as that man quarrelled with Agamemnon,
 he stayed out of the fight, and war came easier
 for us, as the Achaeans were weakened. Yes, I
 welcomed his absence so much I spent a night by
 their black ships, boldly gifting them some sabotage.

But now he's here, the quick death-bringing Achilles.
 He has the life and strength of countless men inside
 his hands, and I am one who admits I fear him.

You think δῖος Achilles, now willing to fight,
 will stay on his side of the plain all night, and stare
 at the battlefield, where Trojans and Argives share
 in the destructive company of Ἄρης ? I don't think so.
 He is coming for our city, and our women.

So let us go in the city. We must answer how things are,
 not what we would wish them to be. Perhaps darkness
 might slow down the man, but perhaps not. Do you understand me?

But let me be wrong about tonight. Because, no matter what,
 tomorrow is coming. That means he will be coming in full
 arms and armour, eager to teach us everything we would want
 to know about him. And when the stray dogs of Troy find a feast
 of fresh Trojan corpses to eat, surely you'll have learned everything
 —surely then, when you're inside the bellies of dogs and vultures.

If all that comes to be, I hope I'm not around to hear it happen. But, God willing, it won't be as I say. So for now, my word is : we go inside the city, and reinforce the gates with strongly-fixed planking. Then, at Dawn, we arm ourselves a-fresh, and take our stand by the walls : and so much the worse it will be for him, when he comes from his black ships across the plain to fight; for a night inside the city walls will strengthen all of us here.

When he comes, we will beat him back again, him and his haughty horses, whom he'll exercise to exhaustion all the way back from the city and across the Scamander to his damned ships.

Then all his aimless wandering might bring his spirit down, and he'll give up his drive to obliterate us. Ah! Before that dream ever comes to be, he'll be a supper for our dogs!"

Then Hector peered down on his friend with a terrifying look in his eyes, and responded, saying :

"Polydamas, your words are no longer so pleasant to hear in our assembly. If I hear you correctly, you would have us go into the city and cower in our houses? Have you not had enough of walls, and retreat, and waiting in the city for what-all to happen? In times past, men all over the earth spoke of Priam's superior city, of its ancient treasures of gold and bronze, which the people inside the city valued. But now all that history is being sold away (is it not?) to fund this war. How many cherished treasures of our hearth have we exported for sale in Phrygia and charming Maeonia? Much of our past has since perished again, since Zeus began to

hate us. But now that Zeus Father shows us favour again,
and promises us victory at the side of their ships,
you'd have us go inside and go to sleep?

Foolish! Let the city fall for all I care—if only we all
live! At this time we'll hear no further words from you.
And that plan of yours has died as words, and will never be :
I do not allow it!

Come now! As I say, you will all hear
and obey! This is what we are to do. Each go to his
men, and prepare supper. But, at all times, keep close watch
(do not forget that), and have every last man stay awake.
And whoever among us is so distressed beyond measure
about his possessions in his house, let him not nail up
the doors, but gather up all his precious stuff, and parcel it
out for our people to swallow away. Better they have it,
than the Achaeans. No more thought of the city! We're fighting
for our lives!

In the morning, at Dawn, in our armour, we will
fight them at the ships. If truly 'δῖος' Achilles has got off
his ass and up onto his feet, we'll make him suffer for it.
If that's how he wants it to be. I will not step back from him
in bloody face-to-face fight until one of us is dead.
I win, and live; or I lose, and die. It will happen as it will,
and that's that. Let Zeus change his mind as much as he
likes, but Ἄρης is neutral on the battlefield : he cuts down
whoever he can : and the killer himself comes to be killed.

So, Polydamas, in answer to your words : We Trojans get

a good night's sleep only one way : in victory, or in death."

Thus spoke Hector to the assembly, and the Trojans cried out in assent, and applauded him. 'Foolish', indeed. For Bright-Eyed Athena had taken their reason away. All approved Hector's ill-ending plan; and not a man commended the word of Polydamas, though his plan, in truth, was the better one. So then all the men went down into the army for supper.

The Achaeans, meanwhile, mourned by the side of Patroclus all night long. And Achilles was the author of many frequent groans as he went from man to man, lowering his man-killing hand gently onto a shoulder; and many a groan from many a man began sounding more and more like growls from a lion :

The growls of a lion tracking the footsteps of the hunter, some deer-hunting man who'd taken away with him the unexpected discovery of little sleeping cubs : so now the lion traverses every bend and hollow along the way, hoping to find him : while the sadness inside grows ever-stronger into rage : just so were the heavy sighs from Achilles, when he began to speak to his Myrmidons :

"Look at what I've done to you. How absurd, how idiotic, were those words I gave you that day, when my one thought, there on the couch in my halls, was to encourage you to fight. With such an elaboration of words I declared that I would destroy Troy down to dust, and bring this man home safe to his beloved son, the fine Opoeis, holding in his arms brilliant valuables, his share of the spoil, appointed by lot. But Zeus

does what he wants, and frustrates the ambitions of men,
 (for all we know) for his amusement. Anyway, what I know
 to a certainty, is that both of us are fated to die here
 at Troy. The soil above will run red with our blood,
 and deep underneath, our bodies will lie still. And that is that.

But I'm not dead yet. So, I say to you now, friend Patroclus,
 before I follow you under the earth : You shall not be buried
 until I have brought to this very spot the great Hector's head,
 he who killed you, our great-hearted Achaean. At this very
 spot, while the pyre is flaming bright, I shall cut the throats
 of twelve sons of the Trojans. My rage shall answer your murder.

Thus have I spoken. You shall have no proper funeral rites,
 but lie here as you are by the ships, until what I've said happens.
 Meanwhile, all those desirable Trojan women we've taken,
 by the by, from all the cities we've wasted down to dust,
 shall sit here night and day, and weep for their fortunes
 beside you. Let them mourn their dead, dead by our spears, beside you."

Then δῖος Achilles requested of his companions to
 set a goodly cauldron upon a fire, so that they might
 wash the blood and gore from the ruined body of Patroclus.
 So they set a cauldron on a blazing fire, and poured in water,
 and fortified the fire beneath with fresh bunches of kindling.
 Then the fire rose up to cradle the belly of the cauldron,
 and the water heated up. Then the water boiled in the
 gleaming bronze, and they washed him, and anointed him
 all over with oils, and filled his wounds with a richly-aged
 ointment. Then they set him on his bed, and covered him
 in fine linen from head to foot, and put on that a white shroud.

All night long, then, Achilles and his Myrmidons
mourned, with groans and tears, for fallen Patroclus.

So then Zeus turned to his wife and sister, Queen Hera, and said :

“Ah, you’ve got your way, my wide-eyed queen : Achilles
is up on his feet. One might decide you’re taking
all this Argive business far too personally.”

And wide-eyed Queen Hera answered him, saying :

“Why does the lord of the heavens say such horrid things to me?
These men, though fated to die, may work some good before they go.
(Though they know little, as befits the little, while I have
immeasurable wisdom.) And how would it look if the queen
of heaven, whom all know to be the most excellent goddess
of all, and doubly so, considering I am an elder
of the family, and am called your wife, you who are master
of Everything.—I say, how would it look if I held my hand
back from punishment, if I thought in my heart they deserved it?”

Thus did Hera continue to speak; but Zeus barely listened.

Meanwhile, Thetis of the seawaves came out of cool silver
froth, and went down into the sweltering forge of inventor
Hephaestus. This cave, of imperishable bronze, made and shaped
by the artful clubfoot himself, glimmered like starlight around her,
as the flames from the smithy danced as shadows over the walls.
God Hephaestus himself she saw perspiring and limping
this way and that, eagerly industrious at his mighty

bellows; for the ingenious god of many crafts was making three-legged tables called tripods, twenty in all, to improve the vast space of his solid-standing hall. One gold wheel was set at the end of each leg, so that these tripods might move this way and that during assemblies of the gods, seemingly moving on their own, yet in actuality following his thoughts from afar, a wondrous invention to witness in action. Thus would these automatons distribute trays among his guests.

So these marvels were complete but for their delicately curved handles, which Hephaestus was now preparing, hammering out rivets, when silvery Thetis appeared before him. And his wife, Charis, saw her, and came forward : Charis, a lovely beauty, one of the Graces, whom the far-famed crooked-walking artful god had chosen for her splendid charm and creativity. She came forward from behind a shining white linen veil, and took the hand of Thetis in kind welcome, and spoke out :

“Ah, Thetis!” she said. “What a beautiful long robe you’re wearing! Come in; you’re always welcome in our home. I only wish you’d visit more often. Come now : let me set out some refreshment.”

So spoke δῖος goddess Charis, and led her pleased guest further on into the sumptuous, many-chambered grottae-work of her home. Then Thetis was invited to sit on a wondrously carven silver chair, and beneath her feet was placed a footstool, for further comfort. Charis then summoned her husband Hephaestus, famous artist, and spoke to him, saying :

“Dear husband, please sit with us. Thetis has a question for you.”

And the famous artist god shambled over with his clubfoot,
and stood before them, massive in size and muscle; and he said
to the two goddesses :

“Ah, Thetis. Lovely Thetis is here in our halls, here before
my eyes. She who saved me with kindness, when I was sunk in pain,
after my dog-faced mother—the goat-eating Queen of Heaven—
had abandoned me in my suffering, and had left me hidden
away, uncaring of me, simply because of my clubfoot.

Then I felt terrible in my heart, and saw no way forward.
But, as if in a dream, two women of the sea came to me,
Eurynome, and Thetis. Eurynome and Thetis took me
close into the bosom of the sea. Ah, Eurynome!
Beautiful daughter of eternally-flowing Oceanus.

I remember it all clearly and well, and happily so.
For nine years I lived in the waves with them,
and my hands became strong and cunning with art,
and I made many brooches and twisted bracelets,
and earrings, and delicate necklaces, down there
in their glimmering cave, deep in the streaming
currents of Oceanus : to me at that time I lived in
inexpressible beauty. And no one knew, or could ever
comprehend, neither man nor god. But Thetis and Eurynome
knew, the two sweet ones who saved me. And now she is here
before me, all these years later, Thetis, in my cave.
Whatever it is you want, lovely Thetis, it is yours.
But to give you my full attention, I must close down my forge.”

So the lamed artist withdrew; and with heavy, lurching tread,

he went to his anvil, monstrous in size and panting all the while,
 as he dragged his foot. But his mind and arms were quick-moving,
 and he removed the bellows from the fire and set it away,
 and quietly collected all the tools into a silver chest.
 Then with a streaming sponge he washed his face, and neck,
 and massive shaggy chest; and he put on a scented tunic
 (in respect of Thetis, and no affectation of the artist).

Then he took his walking stick in hand, and stepped forward, limping;
 but two handmaidens slipped up upon him to support him,
 their master, two youthful girls shaped from gold, and animated
 inside with an understanding mind, and caring hearts, and speech,
 and strength : and their hands, too, had many artful powers, gifted them
 by the immortal god Hephaestus, and advanced on their own.
 Living, as it were, and moving on their own, they stayed close
 to their master, who went forward with difficulty, slowly,
 up to Thetis; then he sat down in a gleaming chair, and he
 took her two hands into his own, and spoke, saying :

“Why, Thetis, whom we honour and respect beyond speech,
 have you come to our home, for our pleasure and welcome?
 Not often do you sit here before us. Speak your mind, and if
 it can be done, I shall do it.”

So Thetis sat before him, with tears streaming down her goddess
 face. Then she began to speak, and told him her story :

“Hephaestus, is there anyone on Olympus, any god
 or goddess, who has suffered so many sorrows as I have?
 And all my misery has come relentlessly from one place : Zeus.
 Out of all the daughters of the waves of the sea, he brought me,

and no one else, to lie beside a mortal man : Peleus,
son of Aeacus. I held out in submission to the man,
though it hurt me very much to do so (for what else was I
to do?). Now this man sits heedless in his halls, weary in mind,
with all his years used up; but I am burdened with many griefs.

For after I lay with him I gave birth to a son, who grew
as a sapling in an fine orchard grows to an impressive tree,
and now he is first among warriors. I sent him in his
ships to Ilium to fight the Trojans, but destiny is
not to allow him to return to his home, and old Peleus.

But while he is still alive, and sees the light of the sun,
he grieves; he has much sorrow; and though I go to him,
I have no power to help him. The girl that the Achaean
sons selected for him as a prize of honour—her, the lord
Agamemnon has taken out of his arms. Since that happened,
my son has been grieving for his lost honour; it eats away
at his soul. Then the Achaeans were pushed back to their ships
and the Trojans wouldn't permit them any release; so then
the Argive elders came to my son with prayer, and offered him
many gifts. And then my great-hearted son softened,
and allowed his dear friend, Patroclus, son of Menoetius,
to enter the battle wearing some of his own armour,
and allowed some of his Myrmidons to accompany him.

But my son, he stayed behind, still grieving at heart.

All day long they fought their way right up to the city gates,
and then and there would have taken the city once and for all;
but Apollo came down to the front lines of battle and killed
Patroclus, simply to give the glory to Trojan Hector.

So now I have come to my knees before you, perchance you may
be so disposed to grant my son, who is doomed to imminent death,

a shield, and helmet, and breast-plate, and all the armour he needs to answer his dishonour. For when they killed his dearest friend, they took away the armour that he would have worn to enter combat. And now my son lies mourning in the dirt, suffering at heart."

Then the artist, his body hobbled at birth, a drab inheritance, spoke out solemnly in answer, and said :

"Be eased, dear Thetis. Your wishes are no longer a worry. If only I had power to turn him away from bitter death, when sombre fate falls, just as the armour I shall provide him with will be a marvel in the eyes of men, whoever it may be who see it. Zeus may always have the final word, but I will fight for you, dear Thetis, until the last day there is."

So saying, immortal artist-god Hephaestus left her there with Charis, his darling wife, and went forward to his bellows. These automata, twenty in all, obeyed the turn of his thoughts; so now all twenty swivelled toward the fire, while he watched them, standing with his colossal physique hard-by the dancing flames.

So all the bellows blew upon the crucibles, and their strong-blowing breath came from all angles round, and in a variety of strengths, so that the very fire itself was sculpted, like all the exquisite hand-work to come, by the mind of the god; and as he worked, now this one, now that, would breathe fiercer and harder; and when he paused, all paused; so in every way his bellows worked for him spontaneously without him turning his head, so that his hand-work could come to completion at speed. On the fire he put adamant bronze, and tin, and precious gold

and silver; then, with his massive arms, he lowered an anvil, huge and heavy, onto the anvil-block. Then in the one hand he took up an enormous hammer, and in the other he held the fire-tongs.

First he hammered out a thick, round circumference of a shield, embellishing it cunningly in every way; and every part of the surface was covered over in brilliant adornment. Round about the whole he fit a shining rim, triple-layered, and bright enough to blind; then he fashioned and attached to it a silver shield-strap. This shield was heavy, five layers thick. And its surface was exquisite with carven adornment from his artful, careful fingers.

Thereon he incised out the earth; thereon the heavens; thereon the waves of the sea; and the indomitable sun, and the moon at fullest round; then he touched the picture with the heavenly stars, and the constellations that crown the heavens in serene encirclement : the Pleiades, and the Hyades, and mighty hunter Orion; and the Bear, that people down below also call the Plough, and the Bent Plough, and the Big Dipper, and the Great Wagon, and the Great Wheels and Carriage, and many other names, all for these magical seven stars, which ever-circle in place and watch hunter Orion, and never sink into the waters of Oceanus, and leave us.

Thereon he carved two cities of men and women, beautiful mortals, all. In the one, he arranged marriages and holiday feasts; and, by the glow of blazing torch-light, they were bringing the bride from her chamber through the city, awaking the loud bridal song. Young men in the dance spun round, and among them

the lyres and pipes sang continuously; and each woman stood in her doorway and smiled. But, not far away from this, the people at the place of assembly were quarrelling : two men were contending over the price paid for a dead man. The killer declared he had repaid the debt in full, and spoke out his cause to the people; but the other denied he had received all that justice demanded. So both demanded arbitration, and a fair decision of authority. Meanwhile the people around them were shouting out, pleading for one side or the other, and the officers held them back. There, then, sat the elders, gathered upon the polished stones, and, in a solemn circle, with staffs of office in their hands, they deliberated on the dispositions of the people. And a loud-voiced herald stood nearby, to deliver judgments to the people, each contention in turn. And in the middle of the circle lay two pieces of gold, for he who delivered the most admired decision of wisdom.

But circling the other city were two armies of men in glittering armour. Now the one army was debating whether to obliterate the city and be done with it, or to gather up all the property first, and divide it out justly among the warriors, all the lovely treasures gathered inside the city. But the city was having none of this, and had armed themselves in secret, and planned to ambush the enemy. Women and the little children stood on the city wall, as a last defence, beside the men of old age; but all the others had gone, led by Ἄρης and Athena. These gods herein were fashioned of gold, and over their figures the artist had put golden garments of wondrous detail. Beautiful and strong were the two gods in their armour, and stood

out from the rest, for all the people at their feet were smaller. So when the company had come to the place that seemed perfect to execute their ambush, a river-bank, which happened to serve as watering-place for all sorts of herds, there the men sat down in their flaming bronze. Then, hidden in the carving, were two spies, sent by the army to scout out the flocks of sheep, and herds of twist-horned cattle. And all these came, followed by herdsmen playing on pipes. There were two of them, and suspected nothing.

Now the state of things was the following : those men lying in wait saw the herdsmen coming. Straightaway they intercepted them, cutting them off from the herds of cattle and flocks of fair sheep; then without much ado they killed the two of them. Meanwhile the enemy army, gathered together at their speaking-place, heard many groanings coming from those herds of cattle; so straightaway some men swung onto their horses, and set out on the way, and soon came to the full weight of their opponent.

Both sides, then, assembled into lines, and fought beside the banks of a river, and cut each other down with bronze-pointed spears. Chaos and Discord descended on unfurléd wings, and joined the battle; with the Goddess of Death, a visitor of Fate who swoops in, to carry away souls in her arms. Now she laid hold onto one man alive but just wounded, on another wholly unhurt, and on one more, a third, who was dead, and she dragged all three by their heels through the tumult around them, leaving track-marks with their heavy bodies, while the Goddess' robes ran dark with the blood of men, all the way up to her shoulders.

And the careful artist placed soft, deep-soiled earth, rich, fertile fallow-land, three-times turned up by the plough, there on the shield.

Thereon were many ploughmen driving their yokes this way and that,
 up and back. And whenever they came to the limit-fence, they
 spun round. Then a boy would run up with a cup of honey-sweet
 wine; and the ploughmen would drain their cups to the lees,
 then eagerly continue to turn the soil up to the next
 limit. And the field grew dark under the plough—though, truly,
 all of it was made of gold. This shading-work behind the moving
 ploughs was a wondrous touch of the artist's hand.

Thereon he also incised out a king's royal domain, to
 complement the common field of the community. There, day-
 labourers were reaping, bearing the sharp sickle in their hands.
 Handful after handful of grain were tumbling to the earth
 in ordered lines, along the swathe they cut, while the binders
 of the sheaves followed close behind, gathering up the riches
 with plaited ropes of straw. Small boys would pick up all the handfuls,
 then hand the armfuls to the trio of binders, over and over;
 and this process went quickly. And, standing among them, the king,
 his sceptre of authority in hand, watched the growing swathe
 with joy in his heart. Nearby, his ministers were preparing
 a feast under an oak tree, and were seasoning a great ox
 felled in sacred sacrifice; and the women sprinkled white crushed
 barley over all of it, for the labourers' afternoon meal.

Thereon he also placed a vineyard, its trailing vines weighed
 down by heavy clusters of grapes, a beautiful golden spot.
 The grapes were bunched dabs of black, while the vines hung on silver
 poles, in a line surrounded by a trench elaborated
 in a beautiful blue; and he put around that, as if hammered in,
 a fence of green-tinged tin. One lone pathway led to this spot,
 where the bearers of the grapes proceeded to and fro, when they

harvested the vintage. Maidens, light-hearted virginal girls,
 skipped beside the youthful boys, as they carried the wickerwork
 baskets abundant with honey-sweet fruit. Then among them came
 a child with a many-stringed lyre voicing itself clearly,
 and he moved his fingers along the parallel strings, singing
 the song of Linos, a mythical minstrel from long ago.
 To his charming voice, all together they stamped their feet,
 and with cries of joy they followed on, and frisked in the dance.

Thereon he also carved in a herd of straight-hornéd cattle.
 The cattle were made of gold and tin, beautifully composed;
 and with their deep lowings they processed from cow-yard
 to a grassy place of pasturage beside a rushing river,
 its current joyfully rushing through swaying thickets of reeds.
 Golden were the herdsmen, who marched in ranks together
 with the cattle. There were four of them, and nine frisky dogs
 came with them. Terrible, however, to look upon were two
 lions at the front of the line of cattle, holding in their jaws
 a loud-bellowing bull. The lions proceeded to drag the bull
 away, and the dogs pursued with the young men. The lions'
 teeth had pierced the wall of bull's hide, and were greedily gulping
 up, and swallowing down, the innards, and the dark blood, while
 the herdsmen set the dogs on them. But the dogs slunk back :
 sometimes lurching forward to bite, then stopping themselves.
 They kept away, though every lost bite stung them at heart.
 All they did was bark and howl and keep back from the monsters.

Then the artist, his body hobbled at birth, a drab inheritance,
 carved thereon a beautiful green place of pasturage, in a fair
 place : and inside the farmyard were shining white sheep;
 and huts, some open-aired, some covered over; and also pens.

Then the artist skilfully fashioned a dance-floor, recalling
the one that Daedalus in Cnosus had made for fair-haired
Ariadne, all those years ago. Youths were dancing; and girls,
their fathers rich in cattle, had joined themselves each to each,
with fingers dropped lightly upon the next one's wrist.
These ripe maidens wore fine linen garments, while the boys
wore tunics, well-spun and scented faintly of oil, which gives
clothing a shine. The girls wore wreaths upon their charming heads,
while the boys wore daggers dangling from silver belts.
Now, with knowing feet, they danced in place exceedingly well,
in a round; just as in the open palms of a potter,
sitting over his wheel, just then he makes test of equipment
and skill, and all runs well, as if with the talent of the gods.
Now again the lines of dancers would run to one another;
and a great crowd had gathered round the passionate dance to watch,
and took great pleasure in the sight : and two acrobats tumbled
this way and that, up and down, as authors of the dance's pace,
whirling in the centre of the bodies.

Then the artist placed atop the uttermost band of the rim,
that was layered in dense order round the well-composéd shield,
the mighty stream of strong Oceanus.

And when the shield, strong and dense, was done, then the artist made
the corslet with breastplate, both shining with the light of fire.
And the helmet, too, heavy and strong, and made to fit snugly
to the temples of its wearer's forehead (just that so skilfully
wrought), and marvellous to see, for it was beautifully
decorated with a terrifying crest of horse-hair, fixed
in a socket of gold; and he made the leg-armour to follow

the contours of the hero's long and mighty legs.

So when the immortal artist had completed his work,
all that shining armour, he limped with it back to the goddess
Thetis, mother of Achilles. So she soared down from the white
peaks of Olympus, and raised up all that glittering treasure,
and carried off the beautiful art from the house of Hephaestus.

End of Book XVIII

Book XIX

Dawn's saffron light, as it pushed up through gushing Oceanus,
 filtered down through gathering clouds, to illumine the dim earth,
 to light a way for immortals and mortals alike : and Thetis
 sea-goddess appeared at the ships, with gifts from the god-artist
 in her arms, for her son, for Achilles, whom she found weeping
 where he lay, his two arms wrapped round the body of Patroclus;
 and the sounds he made were alternately deep, and shrill. And round
 him all his Myrmidons stood there with tears gushing from their eyes.
 Then, one by one, the men looked up, all but Achilles, and saw
 the goddess come, and their flooded eyes widened; and she bent down
 to her son, and pressed his hand in hers, and whispered in his ear :

"My child," she said. "We must let this man lie, even in our grief.
 We must go now. Patroclus has been taken by the will of
 the gods, and that is how it has to be. Destiny will be.
 Even so : you, dear child, can answer this. Take from me now
 this extraordinary armour from god Hephaestus himself.
 You should find it impressive : such a wonder no man has ever
 put upon his shoulders."

Thus spoke the goddess, who placed the shining armour at the feet
 of Achilles, and all the splendid pieces rang tunefully
 together. But the Myrmidons, all of them, stepped back, nor dared
 to look a second time on that bronze light, but kept averted
 in terror.

But Achilles : he turned from his dear friend, and surveyed the arms;
 and his eyes, too, went wide, as an unimaginable rage
 filled him from top to toe, and his gaze was as fire : intense

was that look in his eyes. He lowered himself to the armour,
and took it in his hands, those shining gifts of the artist-god,
and he was glad.

And his spirit strengthened while he inspected, one by one,
the cunningly-made pieces, and their wondrous intricacies.

Then he spoke :

“Mother, you have given me a strength that no mortal man
could have brought into being. Such works as these only gods enjoy.
Now I shall arm myself for war. But it stings to leave the side of my friend,
for I see in my mind’s eye something horrible : buzzing flies,
insinuating themselves deep in the wounds cut by the bronze.
And the maggots that will breed there, to insult his body further.
His life has been cut out of him, so now all his flesh shall rot.”

Then the goddess, from out of the silvery waves of the sea,
spoke to her son :

“Child,” she said. “Do not concern yourself with this anymore.
I will protect him from the flies, all those that feed on those slain
by Ἄρης . Though a year pass through its many changes, he himself
shall not change as the seasons roll round, but remain ever-firm,
and unimpaired in look, if not even better. Now please, son,
summon the Achaean warriors to the place of assembly,
and renounce your rage against Agamemnon, herdsman of men.
Then get this armour on your body and radiate your strength.”

Thus spoke sea-goddess Thetis, mother of Achilles, and her
words filled him with a strength beyond his imagination. Over

dear Patroclus she raised her arms, and let fall through her fingers
the ambrosia of the gods; and she breathed red nectar into
his nose and mouth, filling his flesh with her sacred breath,
so that his body might remain perfectly composed through time.

Meanwhile : Achilles walked along the sands by the waves
of the sea; and wiped away his tears, for now. And he sounded
out a colossal cry that summoned all the hero warriors
of the Achaeans. And not only those worthies came to him.
All those who in times past had stayed within the ordered array
of ships—the helmsmen who handled the steering-oars on the waves,
and all the dispensers of food—even these came to the place
of assembly, on account of the rise of Achilles.
For far too long a time had he kept himself out of the fight.

Two men came forth limping, Diomedes and Odysseus,
two indomitable fighters, yet not, being men, invincible.
So they came with all their weight leaning on their spears,
for their wounds were still painful. Slowly they progressed to the front
of the gathering, and sat down. Then, at the last, the supreme
commander of the army arrived, King Agamemnon, son
of Atreus. He, too, was wounded, an insult from Antenor's
son Coön, who had struck him with his bronze-tipped spear.

Then, when all the Achaeans were assembled on their seats,
Achilles rose to his feet, and the quick-thinker began to speak :

“Son of Atreus, did our quarrel benefit either of us,
or any of us? All that trouble, all that soul-destroying
death, for the sake of one girl? Why Artemis did not cut her
down with one simple arrow, on the day we obliterated

the city of Lyrnessus, who can say? Instead, this is what
 we received, when she became mine that day. Countless Achaeans
 have bit the dust, to put it plainly. Our enemy has brought
 us down, because I sat apart in my anger and rage and
 whatever. What have we done but benefit Hector and his
 Trojans? So, let the Achaeans long remember what happened
 between myself and king Agamemnon, but let that be that!
 Let it all be past and done with, once and for all! Everyone
 has had enough now of all this trouble between us. We must
 subdue the anger in our hearts, you and I both. We have no
 choice but to come together and live, or die as individuals.
 I say now in front of everyone that I have set my anger
 aside. There is no more utility in my stubbornness.
 So come now! I am eager to kill them. To kill them all.
 That is my one greatest desire on earth and under heaven.
 I shall destroy everything in my way. You all stand with me.
 All you long-haired Achaeans now prepare your arms for combat.
 Let us go face them, and test them once and for all, and be done
 with it. Are they enjoying a night's sleep in view of our ships?
 I am sure that not one of them will welcome me disturbing
 their rest. Whoever somehow gets past me and my spear,
 and survives destructive war—they will have earned a welcome rest."

So spoke Achilles, and all the Achaeans cheered, rejoicing
 that the great-hearted son of Peleus had pardoned the slight.

Then, among all the glad noises of his soldiers, commander
 Agamemnon, just where he was, stood up, and began to speak :

"Friends! My Danaan heroes and warriors, all equal in fury
 to Ἄρης , it is right to cease your applause when one rises

to speak. . . . It is not seemly to interrupt my words like this.
 . . . How could even the finest of speakers make himself heard
 over this noise? Men! How is one to hear or speak properly
 when all we're doing is roar? Such a din would baffle even
 the clearest voice, and the sharpest ear. And nothing would get done!

Enough now, men! Allow your commander to speak! I've resolved
 to open my mind to Achilles! But you must calm yourselves first,
 and hear my words. And listen well, each and every one of you!

Very well, then. Many a time I have heard such chastisement,
 from Achaeans courageous enough to speak their minds truly;
 but I say to you now, to each and every one of you, I am not
 at fault! Consider this well, and then tell me if I speak false :

Zeus dictates all acts of men, though we think ourselves free to choose
 for ourselves. And with him goes Fate; and those who walk in darkness,
 and come unseen to spill our blood : the hateful Furies, who seem
 as women, but in truth are man-tearing demons. They attacked
 me that day in the place of assembly, when, from blindness,
 and bewilderment, I deprived Achilles of his rightful prize.
 On whose authority were my words and deeds that day but God's?
 It is He who brings all things to completion. So much we know.

Consider, men, Zeus' eldest daughter : she who brings ruin,
 the very Ἄτη herself, an evil power who deceives us.
 She leads men to a cursed place! How delicate is her quiet step.
 How gently she turns us from the right. For she comes from above.
 She stays near to us unseen over our heads, and baffles us
 as she wishes; and this man, or that, she entangles in woe.

Allow me, all you honourable men, to tell you a story.

Once upon a time, even Zeus himself was blinded by his daughter Ἥρα, goddess of ruin—though men everywhere say he is mightiest of gods and men. The story goes that his wife, Hera, a woman, tricked him on a day before mighty Heracles was birthed into the world, and rested on his fair mother's breast, in glorious Thebe. Zeus spoke out to all the gods: 'Hear me,' he said, "gods and goddesses, that I may speak my mind. Quite soon, Εἰ-λει-θυ-ι-α, goddess of bloody childbirth, shall bring a man into the light of day, who shall soon be lord and master of all round him; and join all those who share my blood.' Then tricky-minded Hera said to him : 'You're fooling yourself! In no way can these words come to be! For how can a mere man sit with us? Come now, Olympian! Swear a mighty oath that a mere man, having fallen from between a woman's feet, shall be a "lord and master" powerful enough to contain the blood that we ourselves share, and only ourselves.' Hera said this to Zeus—all this the wife said to her husband! And yet, for all his omnipotence, Zeus somehow did not foresee her tricky movements, and swore that mighty oath; and soon Ἥρα came to him.

Hera, then, queen of heaven, came down from the peak of Olympus—as the poets say. She went quickly to Achaean Argos. It was there that Kyntressa, elegant wife of Sthenelus (Perseus' son), carried a beloved child in her womb, and the seventh month had begun. So Hera wrested the son into the light before his time, while leaving Alcmene with her due number of months, and kept back the Εἰ-λει-θυ-ι-α.

The queen of heaven then returned to the king : Zeus, Lord of Time :

and said : ‘Zeus Father, who entertains us all with his lightning,
I have something to tell you. This very day a son of your bloodline
has been born, your son Perseus’ grandson, whom his parents
have named Eurystheus. He shall be a fine lord and master
of the Argives, as you have said.”

This Hera said to Zeus, and the words struck him deep in his soul.
Straightaway he grabbed Ἄτη by her hair, awfully enraged,
and swore the most solemn promise that nevermore would Ἄτη
go up to sparking Olympus and share in its splendour,
for she was poisonous, and blinded men from truth.

This he said to all, then tossed her off the clouds, and she whirled down
through the stars to an empty spot on earth, a farmer’s tilled field.

Whenever he thought of her and her poisonousness he sighed,
at the time when his son laboured under the miserable tasks
set by untimely Eurystheus.

Now my tale is told.

Just so was I blinded by Ἄτη , who now is fated to haunt
the world of men, an exile unpleasant on our doorstep;
and in the same way I sighed, and mourned for our confused fortunes,
when Hector in his damned glinting helmet killed far too many
of us by the sterns of our ships. I wept because I’d been blinded!

Thus, considering my deception by the gods, and knowing
that Zeus had allowed it all to happen to us, for he took
my wits away, so I could not see straight, and the girl ruined
things—thus, now I too, am prepared to atone. I offer you

compensation past counting. Eager though you are to face Ἄρης ,
will you remain a little longer, to receive all the gifts
promised you by δῖος Odysseus, when he came to your tent
yesterday night? I shall bring you riches agreeable to your taste.”

And Achilles answered :

“Glorious son of Atreus, king of men, your gifts are tempting;
but I’m leaving now. Whether you have your treasures carried here
or not is your affair. I’m done with babbling fine speeches
while our precious time slips by. Come on now!—Let all of us think
of entering combat! Enough of this delay! Our great work
is not yet completed! I must introduce myself, and my lethal spear,
to our enemies at the front. I shall fill their lines with the fallen,
and they will come to know what it is to be ruined. Do as
I say now!—Go think on facing up to your man in the fight!
There’s nothing much sweeter than spilled enemy blood in the night.”

And, in reply to this, spoke Odysseus πολύμητις :

“No,” he said. “Good Achilles, you have the strength of gods, so much
is true. But also true is that no one else here truly does.

Let us be realistic, and focus on fundamentals.

You must stop encouraging our army to charge forward on
an empty stomach. Troy will not fall to men weakened by hunger.

Instead, good Achilles, command us now to go to our ships
and have our evening meal. In bread and wine we shall find present
daring and strength beyond whatever words may promise. All day
long, Zeus breathed fury into our lines; but now the sun has set,
and our men require fortification. For all the will
in the world won’t raise up a soldier’s arm wearied from hunger.

And dry throats lead to exhaustion whether we like it or not.
 So if we go forth tonight, our famine will kick our legs out
 from under us, and we will collapse in the dust. Moreover,
 we have army morale to consider. Yes, everyone cheers
 for the welcome return of Achilles, but when all the men
 are eye-deep in slaughter, they won't have you on their minds any
 longer; so, again, their strength will fail from famine. But give
 them bread and wine enough to satisfy, and then they'll be ready
 for battle. A full belly makes a warrior want one thing more :
 blood.

So come now! Command the army to retire to their tents
 and prepare their supper. And hear this, too, for it is wise :
 We shall let Agamemnon bring all his glorious treasures
 here where we stand, so that all Achaeans—captains, warriors,
 soldiers—will see them, and everybody's spirits will be raised.

And it's also required for him to stand once more before
 the men, and swear a solemn truth that he has never taken
 the girl up into his bed. He shared no intimacy with her,
 as kings ordinarily do (considering it their rightful way
 to proceed). Our king has been more honourable.

And then you two shall reconcile over the feast table
 in his tent, a meal so opulent that all will speak of it.
 This will fire up our army.

Thus have I spoken, except
 for one word more : Son of Atreus, you must be more observant
 of others in future. As for the present, all the warriors
 in no way blame you for our fortunes, and respect your reply,

considering your thoughtless superiority was no fault of your own.”

Then, Agamemnon, king of men, replied, and said :

“Your Word pleases me very well, son of Laertes, for you have laid out the matter with accuracy and concision, and have recounted it in full. I am willing to swear what you wish. Moreover, my heart urges me to affirm this truth; and no shrewd man would speak false before the altar of a god.

And though he burns to fight, let Achilles cool here for a bit longer, and all you warriors remain as you are, so that you may see the gifts brought from my tent, and we honour the oath with sacrifice.

Thus to my own self I lay this command : Select the best youths of the Achaeans, to bring from my tent all the gifts promised yesterday to Achilles; and fetch the women as well.

Talthybius, my faithful second, first minister of the Achaeans, I charge you to prepare a boar, here at the heart of the Achaean camp, to be sacrificed in honour of Zeus, and Helios!”

But quick-thinking Achilles responded :

“Glorious son of Atreus, shall we not do this another time? Perhaps during some pause of the war? Or when the rage in my heart isn’t so great? While our friends lie rotting in the field, whom Hector cut down with Zeus’ complete sanction,

you would have us convivial over fresh meat? I'm not concerned with hunger pangs. I would much rather order the army to fight without pause for food or drink, and then at the next sunset we can enjoy a feast, after we have taken our revenge.

Until I've tasted that, nothing else shall pass down my throat : no food, no drink. My friend is dead, mutilated by the bronze, lying in my tent, feet to the door, and all around him my Myrmidons weep. And so there is but one thing on my mind now. Slaughter. Blood-spilling. The cries and groans of warriors dying."

And, in reply to this, spoke Odysseus πολύμητις :

"Friend Achilles, the most excellent of all the Achaeans on the battlefield, better than I, and finer with the spear (and not just slightly), I yet surpass you in years, and thereby in experience; thus, hear my counsel with an open heart, and bear me patiently. Who knows of combat better than you? 'Slaughtering', and 'blood-spilling', is hard work for little reward. As a farmer covers his field with the cutting of the straw, yet the harvest itself be a scant one : so, for all our killing, we've cut down far fewer than we might wish—for all our hard work. We've been cutting down, yet not storing up much, for Zeus has tipped the balance toward our enemy, he who does as he wishes, and decides victory, and loss. Still, we must do what we can, regardless of all that, for Zeus Orderer can change his mind. And right now I say our men not only deserve a rest, but require one : they need strengthening for such thankless killing.

Now, friend Achilles, allow me to speak on a further point. Starving oneself is no way an Achaean warrior mourns

a fallen friend—for our men fall by the minute, day by day.
 So, such slaughter would lead to infinite fasting, would it not?
 No. A man must pause, to burn and bury the dead, and brace his
 heart, and weep during that pause, his one day of breath.
 Then, those left alive to face hateful war better think of strength,
 or end up burned and buried with the rest. So, friend Achilles,
 without food and drink, how is your body to give you the strength
 required to reap the full harvest of your revenge? For like it
 or not, the body weakens, and ceases to follow our heart,
 when it is too exhausted to do so.

Regardless of how fast a strong man moves, hunger will catch up
 to him, and take him down. So if we fail to remember
 to fill our body with food and drink, our body will force us
 to think on it. So eat, and let the army eat. Allow this,
 and afterwards we shall persevere through combat unceasing
 from dawn to dusk, cutting our enemy down. A full belly
 is more powerful than a weapon : it gives life. So my word
 is this : we delay our killing arm until it has our full weight
 behind it : then we shall reap all the more. Tonight is supper,
 while tomorrow shall be one full-bodied charge against those
 horse-tamers, who will come know just how sharp Ἄρης can be.”

So spoke πολύμητις Odysseus, who then departed
 with a retinue for honourable Agamemnon’s tent.
 With him went the sons of noble Nestor; and Pyleus’
 son Meges, and Thoas, and Meriones, and Lycomedes
 (Creon’s son), and also Melanippus. Together they went
 on their way to carry out their task as fast as possible.
 From the commander’s elaborate tents the men hauled away
 all that had been promised to Achilles : seven gold tripods,

and twenty glittering cauldrons, and twelve prize-winning horses. The men also quickly led the women away, all excellent women, well-skilled in all manner of hand-work, seven in all; and the eighth that went with them was none other than Briseïs, the innocent maiden of unearthly beauty who had caused, through no fault of her own, a colossal, expensive stand-off. Odysseus efficiently weighed out ten measures of gold, then led the company back, with the youths of the Achaeans carrying all the gifts in their arms. These, then, they set down at the head of the assembly-place, so that all might admire them.

Agamemnon then rose to his feet. And Talthybius, his trusted minister, came to stand beside him, leading a boar by his hands. Then the son of Atreus unsheathed his narrow sword and shaved off some bristles from the animal. He then lifted his hands to the sky, and prayed to Zeus, and all the Argives watched in silence, admiring the king's consummate entreaty.

So he prayed, with eyes upraised deep into Heaven, and spoke out :

"Zeus, first of gods, uppermost among all, and best :
and Earth, and Sun, and the Furies, who punish men who swear false :
hear me now say that I, Agamemnon, son of Atreus, did
not lay a hand on the girl, on Briseïs, neither as lovers
do in bed, nor in any other way. Briseïs remained
untouched in my tents. If hereby I swear falsely,
may the gods bring me woe insupportable, as they bring such
to those who sin against them when speaking false words."

Thus spoke Agamemnon, then raised the cruel bronze, and slit the throat of the boar. When the animal was dead, good Talthybius

took it up into his hands, and whirled round with it, and hurled it into the abyss of the sea. So it sank down under the grey, grizzled surface of the waves, to serve as food for the fishes.

Then Achilles stood up, and spoke to the war-loving Argives :

“Zeus Father, you lay a colossal blindness over men’s eyes! Why Agamemnon plucked the girl out of my arms thoughtlessly, which caused my spirit to burn in inconceivable rage, was perhaps all your doing, for maybe you enjoy to see Achaeans fall into piles of death. Okay. Everyone enjoy their supper, so that afterwards we may destroy them.”

Thus spoke Achilles, and the gathering dissolved, and the men went their separate ways in haste, each to his ships. Then the great-hearted Myrmidons attended to the gifts, bringing them all to the ships of godlike Achilles. There, they placed everything in the tents, and set the women there, too; and the noble friends of Achilles drove the horses down to the herd.

But Briseïs, in beauty alike to golden Aphrodite, when she saw before her Patroclus’ body destroyed by the cutting bronze, shrieked in terror, and wrapped her arms round the body, and wailed in grief; and her fingers clawed at her breasts, and she scratched at her tender throat and face.

Then, through her tears, the woman began to speak, in expression comparable to any goddess :

“Patroclus! Kindest to me in all my misery,
I come to this tent to find misery upon misery.

Greatest of all men here, you lie there dead!
 For me my bad luck knows no ending, only evil after
 evil. All these awful wounds recall to me my husband,
 whom my dear parents gave to me. I had to see
 him cut up with the bronze at the gates of our city.
 My three brothers, too, my mother's beloved sons,
 were killed that horrible day when fate came to us.
 But when quick-moving Achilles killed my husband
 and attacked our goodly city of Mynes, you, good Patroclus,
 would not permit me to weep. You promised to protect me,
 you said, when Achilles took me away in his ship,
 to a marriage-feast among the Myrmidons in Phthia.
 You were kind to me amid the flames of our dying city;
 how strange that was. So I weep for you, and will remember you."

So spoke the girl, and the other women gave out
 some sighs, but not for Patroclus : but for themselves
 and their own cares and sorrows.

Then around Achilles gathered the wise Achaean elders,
 begging him to take a meal : but he refused all entreaty,
 with tears in his eyes, saying :

"Good friends, I ask of you, if you will obey my words, to put
 to me no further appeal as that. My body shall not be
 satisfied by food or drink. Right now its nourishment is grief.
 As things are, until the set of tomorrow's sun I shall stand
 and hold out as I am."

Thus spoke Achilles, who disbanded the elders with a wave
 of his hand. But the two sons of Atreus remained, and stood by;

and also Odysseus, and Nestor, and Idomeneus,
 and venerable old warrior Phoenix, skilful driver
 of horses in his day. All sought to console the warrior
 in his colossal sorrow; but he would not be consoled.
 Only dropping into the mouth of combat would satisfy him.

And as he meditated on his misery he yielded
 heavy and frequent sighs. He moved to the ear of Patroclus;
 then began to speak, low as a whisper, saying :

“Dear friend, why must I see you in my mind as you were?
 Bustling about eagerly and ably preparing our meal
 for us, and we’d sit in the tent, speaking over the sweet food,
 while all the others were bothering with hateful ἄρης .
 Am I supposed to get over how they’ve made you look? The sight
 of you takes all thought of food and drink away from me, though all
 I’d have to do is reach out, since food (not yours) is all round me.
 But why should I bother with food and drink? You’re what I want.
 Nothing else is worth my notice; not now. This grief I feel could
 be no worse if I learned of the death of my own dear father,
 now dropping his soft-hearted tears in Phthia, missing his son;
 while I’m about to raise my hands to fight the men of Troy,
 in the middle of nowhere, for the sake of a woman
 no one will willingly name out loud, without fear of bad luck!
 Just now I think of my son, too. Neoptolemus. While
 I’m sitting here he’s being raised in Scyrus. I hope he still
 lives, for such pain as that would be equal to this—surprising
 as that sounds. I never expected this, in all my thinking.
 I thought, here in this place, far from my home, I alone would die.
 I thought you would return safe in your swift black ship to my son,
 and raise him as your own, and teach him of his father, and show

him my treasured property and palace. All that means nothing to me now; nothing there appeals to me. Perhaps my father is dead.—Or he lives, but barely with any life, wearied down with hateful old age. I understand him better—the feeling in his heart, waiting there for the final, cold news of his son.”

Thus spoke Achilles through his tears, and all the others by him brought to mind, with many sighs, all that they, too, had left behind them at home.

And as they stood in mourning, Zeus, Lord of Time, watched from above; then turned to Athene, and spoke :

“My child, you have abandoned your own warrior. Have you no more care for Achilles? See how he lies by his high-pointed ships, weeping for his lost friend. The others have gone to their meal, but he refuses to taste food or drink. Go then, my sweet one, bring to him the mild ambrosia and nectar, so that he may not drop from hunger in the hours to come.”

So Zeus Father spoke, and Athena goddess, already eager, was already moving, soaring as a falcon with stretched-out wings and crystal-clear call, looming out of heaven through the air; and she came to earth beside Achilles. Thus, while his friends, the warrior Achaeans, were arming for combat, she breathed the mild ambrosia and nectar into his body, so that hunger would not weigh down his limbs in the harrowing hours to come. Then she was gone, back to her mighty father’s strongly-built house; and the Achaeans poured out of the black ships, armed and ready.

As when the sky flows with snow when Zeus authorizes Boreas

to blast everything with northern cold, and the heaven-born flakes
 fall thick and fast : just so substantial came the shining helmets
 and gleaming shields, the corslets with breast-plates, and the ashwood spears,
 streaming from the black ships. The dazzle of it all went straight up
 to heaven, and the earth all round laughed to see the brilliant light;
 and the marching of the feet of men was an enormous sound;
 and in the midst of all this Achilles put on his armour.

He was grinding his teeth, and his eyes blazed intense as fire;
 and an unendurable grief came over his heart. And he
 began to stir his rage as he fitted himself in the gifts
 that god Hephaestus had fabricated with the finest care.
 First, he put on the leg-armour, which conformed impeccably
 to his shape; and joined to it the silver ankle-guards. Next, he
 clasped the corslet round him, with its breast-plate protecting his chest.
 Then he flung his silver-spangled sword of bronze over his shoulder.
 And he lifted his shield, that many-layered wonder, which glowed
 as the full moon glows, when seen from afar. And as a gleaming
 of fire appears over the seawaves, and sailors rejoice
 at it, as it burns high in the mountains from a lonely place,
 (even as a wind carries the ship away deeper into
 the busy sea, farther and farther from friends), just so, Achilles
 sent a gleaming up to heaven, from that shield so carefully
 handmade. And he lifted up his heavy helmet and set it
 on his head; and whenever he moved, it flashed just as a star
 at night : his magnificent helmet, fitted with multi-coloured
 horse-hair that shuddered terrifyingly; and round the horse-hair
 Hephaestus had set smaller plumes of dense and tendrilous gold.
 So Achilles, clothed now in his mighty armour, made trial
 of its artfulness; and discovered that his arms and legs moved
 light as air; in fact, his limbs had become as wings.

He went to his spear-case, a stand many generations old,
and drew out his father's spear : huge, heavy, indestructible.

No other Achaean on the field could handle the weapon
with any facility; Achilles alone had the know-how.

The spear brought to mind the centaur Cheiron, a peerless teacher
who had educated the young Achilles in many crucial
arts. This spear, of Pelian ash, Cheiron had given his father,
atop Pelion's peak, to take down only the finest warriors.

Automedon and Alcinous, meanwhile, were tending to
the horses. They yoked them to the beautifully-put-together
chariot; and settled the handsome breast-collars around them;
and fit the bits into their jaws. Then the two men drew the reins
into the chariot-box. Automedon took up a shining whip, then went up
and in.

Behind him walked Achilles, ready for combat, gleaming bright
as the sun, of Hyperion, the god of heavenly light.

Then he spoke lowly to his two horses, saying :

"Xanthus and Balius, men know even of you, the children
of Podarges! Consider, if you will, a better plan than
last time. This time bring your driver back alive (after I've had
my fill of combat). Please don't abandon me dead on the spot,
as you two fine creatures did to even finer Patroclus."

Then the gods, who never cease to surprise us—in this instance,
Hera—worked a miracle, in a trivial effort to distract him.

Xanthus the fast-mover bowed his head down in reply, and his glorious mane extended all the way down to touch the earth, and answered Achilles with sounds of understandable speech.

“We will bring you away safe, mighty Achilles; but one day soon you won’t come back at all. The fault won’t be ours, but God’s, and Fate’s. We have a keen instinct for doom; it wasn’t any slowness or sluggishness of ours that allowed the Trojans to insult Patroclus’ body. It was he whom lovely-haired Leto bore, great god Apollo, who killed Patroclus up at the front lines. And it wouldn’t matter if we gallop faster than Zephyrus, whom all know is the swiftest wind of all—we can’t outrun your fate. You’re destined to be brought down by a god and a mortal.”

And before Xanthus could speak further, the Furies stuffed the bit deeper in his mouth, and tightened his bridle, to stop his speech.

Achilles, then, past caring about miracles, or anything otherwise except war, responded with a fighting spirit :

“Good Xanthus (suddenly harsh), why remind me of Death and Fate? An animal doesn’t need to tell me anything. I know I’m to die here, far from everything I care about, alone. Thus it shall be. But until I hit the dust, I’m not stopping my fatal hand until I’ve had more than my fill of fighting.”

So spoke δῖος Achilles. Then, aiming his eyes at the front lines, he let loose a war-cry, and spurred his fast-galloping horses.

End of Book XIX

Book XX

Raised on glimmering columns, the house of the gods stood sublime
on the highest peak of Olympus, all polished gold and silver
and bronze and ivory, shining like a fire in the air;
and the workmanship excelled the material, for artist-god
Hephaestus himself had erected this marvellous palace
for Zeus Father. So, from this steep height, amid the radiance
of its glittering colonnades, Zeus watched you, Achilles,
insatiable for war, arm yourself by your sharp-ended ships;
while facing you, way down below, up on a slight rise of the plain,
the Trojan army stood mobilized to meet you, and answer
your rage. Now Zeus summoned Themis, goddess who superintends
celestial law and order, to convene all the gods at the space
of assembly, come from their many haunts and hideaways
(hid there amid the many deep ravines of the rocky mountain
prominence, or elsewhere, anywhere, in the pathless open
space of things). So holy Themis spread herself out every which way,
and requested of the gods to hasten to the house of Zeus.
Not a single river did she fail to visit, and all the nymphs of the streams
rose up to heaven, and all those who possess the silent groves
in fair places, and all those who lie at peace on meadow grass,
and all those who frolic by the sources of mighty rivers.
Only Oceanus remained away, for he was the bond
who held the world together in his circumferential grip.
So they came together at the house of Zeus Cloud-Gatherer,
all the gods and goddesses of all the worlds, and sat amid
the glimmering colonnades from the skilled hand of Hephaestus.

So there they were, in the sacred open space of assembly—
even Earth-shaking Poseidon, whose reply to invitations

from his brother was not always a matter of course—even
 Poseidon obeyed the goddess Themis, and came from the waves
 of the sea to be among them all. So as he sat with them,
 he questioned Zeus Brother on the purpose of all this movement :

“Yet again the bright flash of lightning brings us home.
 Why? Don’t tell me that old story of the Trojans
 and Achaeans? Because I know they’re about to
 make the ground shake yet again, in close fight.”

And Zeus answered :

“Yes, Earth-Shaker, that is the purpose of this assembly.
 They interest me, those men, though they’re small, and die.
 Now surely I shall lie in a hideaway of Olympus,
 and watch the view with pleasure. All you others go
 among the Trojans and Achaeans, and choose whichever side
 you fancy, whichever side your heart leads you to.
 And, in truth, my family, all this war is more curious
 than you may imagine. Achilles is so intense with rage,
 so heart-struck from the death of his friend, and all he cared for,
 that he has somehow gained a power—even without your
 intervention—that might shatter Fate, and surpass the written.
 He might dismantle Troy piece by piece from his own hand alone!
 Thus, you, powerful ones, go down and sort things out, if you like.
 I would prefer to slow things down, as I may, for my pleasure.”

Thus spoke Zeus, Lord of Time, and awakened inexorable war.

And the gods departed, at variance in their hearts and minds.
 Queen Hera of the heights, of the stinging tongue, went to the ships

of the Achaeans, and with her went war-rousing Athena
 of Victory; and marine Poseidon, who brushes men aside;
 and trickster Hermes Luck-Bringer, whom the gods knew
 made the wool grow : and together with them, but some distance
 behind, went Hephaestus, limping, yet rushing on his scant legs.

And to the Trojan side went man-slaughtering, bloodstained Ἄρης ,
 and helper Apollo, averter of harm; and Huntress Artemis
 Saviour, she who soothes; and Leto, even the mother of twins
 long-haired Phoebus and the moon-queen huntress; and Xanthus, river
 god of Troy; and Heavenly Aphrodite, lover of laughter.

Now, for so long had the Achaeans enjoyed supremacy
 over their enemy (for just so long that the gods had remained
 far off from the affairs of mortal men), now that Achilles
 had revealed himself, and in that way implying victory
 for the one, and ruination for the other, the hapless
 Trojans. Achilles, who had stayed away from war, was now here,
 and a fear and trembling overtook each of the enemy
 whose eyes fell upon his terrible shape, the fast-moving son
 of Peleus, life-wrecking Achilles, equal in intensity
 to Ἄρης himself. But now the Olympians were here, too,
 having entered into the wasteland of the grim battlefield,
 where the men stood exhausted, where the landscape was polluted
 with blood. The gods had come now to worsen combat, if such horror
 were possible, considering all the carnage covering
 the broad Scamander plain as it was. Yet here came the rainbow
 over everyone's heads, the sign of dread Ἐρίς , the goddess
 who unleashes Chaos, and drives men into the jaws of war,
 never to return. Next came Athena Bright-Eyes, shrieking in
 the ears of the warriors, louder than her father's thunder.

She went along the collapsed remains of the trench, wandering
 along the outside face of the Argives' devastated Wall;
 then went upon the sea-shore, overlooking the ancient waves
 resounding up the headland, and sent out a cry that outdid
 in magnitude even the crash of all the waves on all the shores
 of all the places out in the pathless expanse of the world.

But in answer to that came a shout from Ἄρης, who revealed
 himself as a dark cloud obscuring the topmost pinnacles
 of the city of Troy. His cry roused the Trojans in their hearts,
 and did not scare them, but inspired the raising of their hands
 in war. And his cry spread over the battlefield entire
 as he flashed overhead, darkening with shadow the snaky
 Simois, that flowed into the Scamander river; and he
 cast in shadow the hill of Callicolone, whom people
 had named "Beauty Hill" in honour of the judgment of Paris
 (in hindsight an inauspicious distinction for the landmark).

So the gods from above, all the fortunate ones, encouraged
 the two armies to brawl together, and arduous combat
 to break out, effortful and exhausting. The father of gods
 and men, thus, thundered terribly from above, rocking the sky
 from one end to the other; while down below, Poseidon
 of the crashing breakers made the whole earth shake; and all the high
 peaks of the mountains swayed side to side, all over the planet.
 All the springs pouring down sacred Ida shuddered in their beds,
 and all Ida's summits, all its caves and woods, the haunts of minor
 immortals. And the gleaming towers of the Trojan city swayed
 this way and that; and all the ships of the Achaeans rattled
 upon their props, on the beach by the restless waves of the sea.

Then, jarred from his throne far down below the earth, Hades leapt up

onto his feet, the dread overseer of the dead, and cried
 out in consternation, lest all this earth-shaking (no doubt due
 to always-irritable Poseidon) crack the soil open,
 revealing through the deep-reaching fissure the interior
 of his domain, the place of departed spirits, a mouldy,
 dank, and gloomy chasm, not a pleasant sight for daylight eyes;
 indeed, the gods above were always disgusted at the sight
 of the Underworld, where hapless human spirits collected,
 lost forever to the light of the sun, and its fertility.
 So while the gods above clashed with an inconceivable noise,
 Hades down below cowered in a solidly-built doorway,
 a helpful tip he'd once heard, to follow when the soil threatened
 to collapse around him, during one of Earth-Shaker's earthquakes.

Now, high up on the battlefield, the gods faced off at random,
 according to who came upon whom amid the swirling dust.
 So infamous Poseidon faced Phoebus Apollo, who'd brought
 his wingéd arrows. While son of Ἄρης, Enyalios, he
 who kept close watch on the movements of warriors in combat,
 unfortunately came against bright-eyed goddess Athena.
 And far-working Apollo's sister Artemis, shooter
 of her own golden arrows, lover of the echoing hunt,
 faced off with her stepmother, the always-charming Queen Hera.
 While the mother of both archers, Leto, indeed the goddess
 of motherhood and protector of the young, evidently
 thought these mortal warriors old enough to destroy, and came
 against Hermes Trickster. Hephaestus, meanwhile, stood furious
 against the deep-whirling river Xanthus, whom the mortal men
 called the Scamander.

And so that was how it was, gods fighting gods, for the simple

diversion of it all. But deadly serious was Achilles
 life-wrecker as he sought out Hector, King Priam's eldest son,
 hidden somewhere in the massive extension of warriors :
 for the spirit of Achilles had but one command inside :
 to glut Ἴαπερς unto choking with the spilled blood of Hector,
 thereby gratifying the raging god of war.

Now the gods have no compunction about humiliating
 men, and goading them to questionable actions, for reasons
 we'll never understand for certain. So, Apollo, leader
 of the Muses, but also rouser of armies, came up close
 to hero Aeneas in the deceptive guise of Lycaon,
 a son of Priam, and spoke out in that mortal's voice, saying :

"Aeneas, cleverest of Trojans, what about all those threats
 against the Achaeans, that you once so strenuously declared
 to the nobles of Troy, over your cups of wine? Have you not
 promised to face, to the death, the son of Peleus, Achilles?"

Thus spoke Apollo, Zeus' son, goading Aeneas shamelessly.

Then warrior Aeneas answered him :

"Should a son of the king speak to one of the best warriors
 you have in this way? I will face Achilles when I'm ready,
 and not a moment before, and certainly not from any
 goading from you. That man knows no fear. No one just faces
 him without preparation; or they won't be walking away.
 I fought him once under the peak of Ida, when he'd slithered
 up to steal our cattle. I've never seen a faster-moving man.
 He drove us back with what seemed like a hundred spears in his hand;

then brought to dust the city of Lyrnessus, and all the people in it. I was only saved because Zeus blessed me with quick feet of my own. I ran away. That's what you do against Achilles without proper preparation : you run quick, and you hope your knees are swift enough to keep you breathing. Mine were, thankfully, or I'd be dead now from the hands of that killer, and his well-wisher Athena. Wherever he is, she is sure to be near him, to help him, shining a path of deliverance before his steps, whether it be a city to destroy, or a people to murder. For reasons unknown, she favours him, and guides his bronze right. He's here now before us : so assume, good Lycaon, that Athena is around here too.

With that in mind, would any man lightly face off against him? If the gods protect him from ruin, how do you fight against that? No spear ever flies from his hand but always runs through its mark. Knowing this, knowing Athena's on his side, a man pauses to think before facing Achilles, who boasts of the power to tear apart every Trojan here. For what power doesn't the Olympians have? So to answer your question, Lycaon, I'll face Achilles as soon as the gods stretch out the state of the war levelly, impartially. When that happens I'll face Achilles, and will not fall, though his body be made of bronze!"

Then Apollo, son of Zeus, answered him :

"Come now, warrior! Pray to your own gods, who are forever yours. Men say that you, too, are touched with Olympus. Is your mother not Aphrodite? She is a daughter of Zeus; but the mother of Achilles, however godly, is not. Thetis is a goddess of the seawaves, nothing more than that. So your mother is Zeus' own child, while Thetis' father is the old man of the sea! So go now, with raised-up bronze, straight

for Achilles! When you attack, ignore his abusive words—
don't be fooled and fall back from any of his babbling threats."

So saying, Apollo Archer, God of Sound Health, inspired
Aeneas, granting him a deep, limitless breath of combat fury;
then he turned away, the bold son of Anchises, and charged through
the tumult of soldiers flashing on his way to the front lines,
ready to face, glimmering top to toe, the foremost fighters.

Queen Hera, for her part, had wit too sharp to miss Aeneas
weaving through the jostling armies, on his way to Achilles.
So she spoke out, and all the gods and goddesses heard her speak,
regardless of their position on the dusty battlefield :

"Earth-Shaker! Bright-Eyes! You must both consider how you want these
things to be. There in his fiery armour walks Aeneas.

Apollo has persuaded him to trust his courage! So now
he moves in fury toward Achilles, to fight him face to face!
So come then. We must divert him on his way, and redirect
his steps, or else go stand beside Achilles, and inspire
him with a strength unimaginable. Let no ambition
large or small go unfulfilled in his heart, but let him complete
all he wishes. In this way we shall demonstrate, to all there are,
that we who defend him are the best of the Immortals, those
who cannot lose; while the others, protecting the Trojans,
are as the wind : they move idly, to no lasting effect.

So the Trojans have lasted all this time, and have piled up
heaps of Argive dead. What of it? Limitations show themselves :
one might endure for ages, but only to fall at the end,
and in that way annul all that once-cherished endurance.

We have come down from Olympus this day to face mortal war.
 So for the duration of this one day we shall not allow
 Achilles to receive even a scratch. Are we or are we not
 the best of the gods? These Trojans are no appropriate match
 for our alternative. But, fair as we gods are, tomorrow
 let him be alone, to suffer whatever Fate spun for him
 on the night his mother brought him into the world.
 But, just now, this moment, Achilles requires us to make
 our will known to him; for if some god or other appears to
 him during combat, his sight will be blinded, and all defence
 lost; because, as we are, our faces and shapes are hazardous
 for mortals to see : we're too brilliant to fit in their minds."

Then Earth-shaking Poseidon answered her :

"Hera, queen, quiet your storm. Your fury outruns all wisdom.
 Such counsel, in this case, is neither helpful nor attractive.
 Who—other than Hera—believes gods fighting gods in battle
 a good idea? I don't. Where is there any advantage in that,
 except to make Zeus laugh at us? No. Olympians, hear my
 Word. We keep away of the dusty society of men;
 we watch the war from whatever vantage point we choose;
 and we engage where we will (if we see benefit in it),
 and leave the hard battle for man against man. Let them defile
 the world with their gore—apparently they find it 'glorious'
 to do so.

On the other hand, if Ἄρης or Apollo
 makes a beginning of fighting, or restrains our Achilles
 from fighting at his maximum, then we shall rise, and let war
 pour out of our infinite power. Very quickly, I think,

they'll distance themselves from the affairs of these mortal men, and flee back to Olympus, with their allies—once they understand our resolution, through the punishment our hands will bring them.”

Thus spoke Poseidon, who then gathered the gods favourable to the Achaeans to a spot outside the city of Troy, a spot with a history amusing for Poseidon Earth-Shaker to recall. Many ages earlier, the then-king Laomedon, leader of the Trojans, put Poseidon to work in erecting a high, steep wall round the city, for which the master of the sea would receive a handsome recompense. But when the work was done, the king defaulted on his promise, and (incredible to relate) Poseidon received nothing. Thus, as a business reply of his own, Earth-Shaker sent forth a sea-serpent, grey-green and undulating, to demolish ancient Troy, and take his wall away besides. Laomedon, whose easiest option would have been to address the god straight, instead compounded his troubles by appealing to a seer, who prophesied (for a price) that the king would have victory, but only if he yielded up his daughter, Hesione, to the sea-monster. This oracle revolted the king, who then might have agreed on terms with Poseidon. Instead, he hired Heracles to wound the sea-monster, which the champion god did, but then received in payment not the herd of immortal horses promised him, but mere mortal ones! So this is how it all turned out for all concerned in this admittedly shameful episode of the gods, which some deplore as tantamount to idle “backstairs gossip” unworthy of a tale, let alone inclusion in the *Iliad*. The two gods, unhappily victims of a conspiracy to defraud, decided the best humiliation given to Laomedon would be to ignore him; and so they did,

though burning to exact revenge. Instead, they hoped the sea-monster would be stronger than the wall—obviously an idle hope.

So that was the tale of the king with friends in high places.

The king withheld his workers' wages, simply because he could.

But now, all this time later, his perjuries were paying off with blood; and the gods, as usual in such matters, enjoyed the last laugh. And here is an addendum, which only some knew, to this tale : Hesione lived, and it is this Hesione with whom Heracles fathered a child, the very Teucer, the best sniper of all the Achaeans!

So, at the outlay of rubble, old decayed brick from times' past, a collapsed wall on the outskirts of Troy, dark-haired Poseidon and the other gods sat down. There, they saw, far in the distance, the waves where the sea-monster emerged from the deep and slithered onto the shore. But between themselves and the sea a colossal battle of armies met in full-blooded riot.

A cloud of dark dust obscured the bricks, and kept changing shape, without dispersing on the wind, nor allowing anything to enter it : clothed in this cloud sat the gods for the Achaeans.

The party for the Trojan side sat facing them from afar, from the slopes of Callicolone, the ancient 'Beauty Hill'. There, sat Apollo Sunniest, and Ἄρης , destroyer of cities.

So, sitting on the sidelines, the gods watched the battle evolve, and deliberated together, and contributed their ideas; but they hesitated from starting cruel war with each other; and, hovering over everything, was Zeus, who commanded all.

And so it was that down under the lord of all things living
 and dead, and will be, and never was, the broad Scamander Plain,
 between city and sea, was overrun with men and horses;
 and like a second sun the totality of bronze arms blazed,
 in the heat of movement amid combat. The earth shook beneath
 their feet while the two armies clashed, crossing spaces between
 them, lusting for war. And two warriors closing the distance
 between them, heading straight for one another, were Aeneas
 and Achilles. Anchises' son advanced with menacing step,
 his intimidating pigmented plume shuddering above
 his hard stare. His heavy steadfast shield he held over his chest,
 in which his heart beat slow and steady; and he waved his bronze spear
 before him, taunting the other with its lethal-sharpened tip.

Facing him, the son of Peleus went forward to meet him
 like a lion, a raving lion that men are eager to kill,
 as every last member of the village gather there watching,
 with like hope. At first he pays them no mind, and goes on his way;
 but then a swift-moving youth in the prime of his strength
 lets a spear fly, and it hits its mark, somewhat : then the lion,
 crouching in gathering strength for a crushing attack, its mouth
 open wide to show them his spiked teeth foaming :
 then the lion roars, roars up from out of the heart of his spirit
 —bold, courageous—and with his tail whips himself all over,
 growing ever-wilder with every lash of his ribs or flank;
 then he begins the fight, and charges ragefully straight for the
 people with a terrible light in his eyes; and either he
 kills a man, tearing his precious life from out of his body,
 or is himself killed, before the eyes of the crowd.
 With such unshakable fury Achilles went straight for Aeneas.

So they approached one another; and as they came near enough for words, it was quick-thinking δῖος Achilles who spoke first, saying :

“Glorious Aeneas, why do you come before me, having crossed so far a distance through your brave battalions to do so? You take your stand, so now you think you will master me in fight? Perhaps boasting glorious over my body will secure a thank you from horse-breaker Priam? The king of Troy will never give you the throne, even if you killed every last Argive here, because he has sons—the ones that are still alive—and he’s not an idiot. It’s you who are deceiving yourself : killing me gets you nothing but an invitation to leave, which is yours to do anytime anyway. You wish to stay, is that it? Because the Trojans have carved you a pretty piece of land, a fine orchid or vineyard, all yours?—If you kill me? Unfortunately I don’t expect that to be the outcome here. You have already stood before me, and I have already sent you running in terror. Surely you remember scrambling down Ida’s sleep slope, as fast as your feet could take you, when I came to rob your herd of cattle? You were alone then, but in all your hurry to flee from me, I don’t recall you looking over your shoulder on your way down. But here you are.

Back then you fled to Lyrnessus—till I obliterated it to dust, with the gods on my side; and I took the women, and their freedom, with me. But again Zeus Father let you live; or perhaps it was some other gods. Today, though, no power will save you, no matter how much courage you’ve put in your heart. So I kindly suggest you back away, and vanish among your men, and not face me, or you will suffer a terrible

fate. If you're no imbecile, you'll understand what I say."

Thus spoke δῖος Achilles. Aeneas then replied, saying :

"Son of Peleus, your words would terrify me, if only
I were a child. As it is, I, too, can use words to mock
and abuse—if you're dignified enough to hear my reply."

And Achilles stood silent; so Aeneas continued, saying :

"You and I know each other's lineage, and of each other's
parents, for we've both heard all the old tales celebrated
from mouth to mouth, down through time by mortal men.
But of each other's parents, with our own eyes we've seen nothing.
Everyone says you're the son of the excellent Peleus,
and that your mother is Thetis, daughter of the saltwater.
(It's said her hair falls in beautiful waves, those lucky enough
to have seen it.) As for me, my mother is mighty Aphrodite;
and great-hearted Anchises is my father. This very hour,
one or the other of these parents shall mourn their fallen child,
for it's going to take more than mockery to separate us.
When the fight is over, it won't be words that saved you, or me.
But our sharpest weapons are not yet raised. Shall we continue
then with words, so that you may know of my lineage (which all
know of) before you try to ridicule me a second time?"

And Achilles stood silent; so Aeneas continued, saying :

"All know that Zeus fathered Dardanus with tender Electra,
all those ages ago. Dardanus established the city
of Dardania among the foothills of Ida. That was

the time when the people were still spread out among the rivers
of the mountain, and not yet come together at Troy, the holy
city on the plain. Dardanus fathered Erichthonios,
who later was king, and the wealthiest of all mortal men.

Picture this, Achilles. This man had three thousand horses
grazing at pasture in a meadowland. All of them were mares
exulting in their frisky young. Then the North Wind appeared as
a black stallion and mounted them, and conceived twelve fillies.
While playing on the life-giving earth, these daughters of the wind,
in one spring, would leap over fields of flowering asphodel,
and not touch even the topmost leaf. And these same twelve horses
could gallop over the sea, as if the ancient waves were a
firm-set highway, and the all-arcing breakers solid at heart.
These, then, were the wondrous horses of Erichthonios.

And so my lineage stretched forth, for this king fathered Tros,
who then led as king of the Trojans; and Tros fathered three sons,
all excellent : Ilus, Assaracus, and Ganymede.

You know of Ganymede. The gods raised him up to Olympus
on account of his unearthly beauty, to pour out the wine,
and live with the Immortals forever, in eternal youth.

Then came Laomedon among my descendants, fathered by
Ilus; and Laomedon fathered Tithonus, and Priam,
and Clytius, and wise Hicetaon. And Assaracus
fathered Capys, and Capys Anchises, and Anchises me.
Priam fathered Hector, making the two of us third cousins.

So this is my family and blood I solemnly speak of."

And Achilles listened, and heard, and still his hand stayed lowered;
so Aeneas continued, and said, with a smile :

“As for a man’s courage in places you ‘obliterate to dust’,
Zeus leads men to excellence, just as he lets them fall away;
all is as he wills it. What is all our courage worth anyway,
when Zeus reigns supreme with strength beyond ours? He has a power
very enviable here on earth : the power to ignore us.
Zeus Father doesn’t have to look over his shoulder either.

Could you have imagined this? The two of us speaking like kids
at playtime in the middle of all this war-killing! Yet with
you before me I can barely hear it around me. But the spear
in my hand is heavy and strong. I am ready to raise it.”

So said Aeneas; and now it was Achilles who smiled,
and spoke out, saying :

“You and I could pile a shameful load of words of disgrace
heavier than the largest ship not yet built could ever bear.”

And at that Aeneas laughed, and replied, saying :

“Indeed, it’s far easier to speak than to lift a finger;
and a danger is to stop at words. People get easily
lost in them. Very flexible is the tongue, and very many
are all kinds of words. We could stand as in a pasture and graze
on words, up and down, all day long.”

And Achilles replied :

“And all our new insults, reared by our tongues, will be not much more than the same old insults, regrown in new ways. Wide as the world, it seems, is the world of words, together on your side and on mine. I can speak my thoughts every which way I can, then hear the same thoughts spoken of in a new way by someone else, somewhere else. Words may be uncountable, but only so much can be said.”

And Aeneas replied :

“So what need is there for us to outdo each other in words? We could end up like two women with anger eating their hearts, quarreling in plain sight in the street, their anger leading them to true words and to false words. So yes : what are words worth to us, now?”

At these words, Aeneas raised his spear, yet spoke further—but only to say :

“So enough of talk. All its air will protect neither of us. Now we fight, face to face, and find out what’s what.”

So saying, he drove his spear forward; and its sharp bronze tip, attached to his hands, tore through the air and bashed the other’s smartly-terrible shield, and the tip rang out loud as a herd terrified. δῖος Achilles, cocked behind the shield, his full pose well-composed, well-spread, pushed the shield forward with his heavy hand, and the prophecy of his own death flashed through Achilles’ mind, and he anticipated the spear-point ripping through the shield. Aeneas’ strength had quickly become a matter of concern to him, and Achilles’ fast-moving mind took thought this way and that, passing from one plan to the next, at the centre of

himself, and in an instant, as the spear bashed his godly shield.

Fool! It was then that Achilles discovered that gifts from gods are not easily broken by mortal men, nor even moved.

The menacing spear of mighty Aeneas only shattered into uncountable pieces against its layer of gold.

A glorious gift from the god-artist was Achilles' shield.

Aeneas was strong enough to pierce two layers, but the god, at his cripple-footed pace, had fashioned his artful shield with five layers in all : two of bronze, the two inmost of tin, and one layer of gold, which had destroyed the ashwood spear-shaft.

So the two colossal warriors circled one another, keeping at a distance, each knowing there was no going back, only forward. As they moved, the long shadow of a death-bringing spear passed over the body of Aeneas, while Achilles sent his spear-point out into the air and back, feinting with it, toying at the edge of attack range. Achilles' mind ran on (thought to thought, option to option, move to move) too quick for any other mind to follow, except some war-wise mind greater than his. Achilles then let fly, and, faster than he would have thought, Aeneas was compelled to shift position of his well-rounded shield, and took the reverberation of the spear as it slammed into him. Its bronze point entered in at the rim, and ripped through the narrow sliver of the rim's topmost layer, where the bronze was thinnest, and thinnest its backing of ox-hide. Aeneas had never before in his life blocked a spear shot so subtly (or so luckily) : and the impendence of death was very real now, as he had only just tolerated the attack, which wasn't yet completed. As his shield clanged, he raised it high and sent the death spear rushing out through the rim and up and away from him; and, for all its rage, the spear fixed

itself in the earth behind Aeneas' back. The bronze had
 come in close and precise, and now it was Aeneas' turn
 to be concerned, in fact gravely concerned, with his enemy's
 strength. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the ruined part
 of his shield, and he rose up from his one knee—but he hadn't
 realized he'd been forced down to the dirt; and now he felt deep fear;
 and a measureless grief came into the eyes of Aeneas
 as he gathered himself, for he now understood Achilles,
 who had drawn his sharp sword, and vehemently-quick came in on
 Aeneas with a deafening exululation : and the sunbeams
 hit the sword edge and blinded his eyes; and he dropped back to earth
 to see the death-sharp blade slicing straight down at him. So he reached
 out and pulled in a long, heavy rock (that no man nowadays
 could lift on his own, even if his life depended on it),
 and blocked the path of the incoming sword blade successfully.
 While the bronze clanged, Aeneas pushed it aside with the stone, then rolled
 out and away from under mighty Achilles. It was then
 that the fast-moving son of Peleus would have cut the life
 out of Aeneas' body with the next blow of his sword,
 had not Earth-Shaking Poseidon been paying close attention.

To the Immortals Poseidon immediately began
 speaking, saying :

“ὦ πόποι ! I feel myself feeling concern for Aeneas,
 only a man, but a great-hearted one, one of the finest.
 Must even he be cut down, just now, in his prime, with so much
 potential ahead of him, simply because Apollo slipped
 some sly words into the ear of Achilles, who knows full well,
 idiot that he is, that nothing (no hobnobbing with the gods)
 will save him from a miserable death unavoidable?

Surely Apollo's not saving him; even I can foresee
 that much. But this Aeneas : Why must this excellent mortal,
 innocent of any implication in the origin
 of this debacle, die for it? It's someone else's problem;
 let it be someone else's sorrow. May I remind you all
 that Aeneas faithfully and cheerfully gives welcome gifts
 to the gods, freely and bountifully showing himself
 an agreeable man, gratifying infinite heaven?
 The sweeter the gifts, all the sweeter our immortality.

No, let us have none of this. Come now! We will pluck him from death.
 Imagine what Zeus would do to us, if Achilles does that
 to him! Anyway, do we not all know that Fate will have him
 escape this? So let it be us who save him! And son of Zeus
 Dardanus is this man's progenitor. That noble bloodline
 is not perishing on this battlefield. Zeus loved Dardanus
 greater than all the children born to him by mortal women.
 Zeus may have come to detest Priam and his race of Trojans,
 but, because my brother is my brother, the Trojan line
 is to outlast this war. One day soon Aeneas shall be king
 of the people, and so shall the sons of his sons, waiting to be
 born in ages to come. So, what are we going to do now?"

Then wide-eyed Queen Hera answered him, saying :

"Earth-shaker, 'we' are not going to do anything. You must
 decide for yourself regarding this Aeneas character.
 Save him if you like; or watch Achilles bring him down, and all
 his courage with him. Really now, the two of us, Athena
 and I, have both made solemn promises never to meddle
 in these mortal affairs (which truly are beneath us) : not when

the Trojans awake to their Day of Evil, nor when all Troy
 reducts to dust in the flames of eradivative fire,
 after the war-wise Achaeans set those consuming flames alight.”

And to all that loftiness Lord Poseidon said not a word,
 but went his way through the confused turmoil of combat
 and the showering spears agitating the air, and came to
 the spot where Aeneas was sprawled in the dust, under the sword
 of glorious Achilles. Earth-Shaker Poseidon then showed himself
 to the gaze of Achilles, for one blink of an eye, and the strength
 of the light shoved δῖος Achilles off his feet. He fell back
 onto the ground, but still holding the sword in his mighty hand.

And under Aeneas Poseidon slipped his own hand, and raised
 him up. Recessive into the air, made light, Aeneas went
 up high over the showering spears and countless lines of war,
 high over the warriors and horses and chariots, raised
 up by the hand of the god. But then Poseidon lowered him
 down, there on the sidelines of the raging combat. Aeneas,
 still catching his breath, saw near him the Kaukones,
 a tribe little known to history, preparing to enter
 the fight; then Poseidon Earth-Shaker spoke in his ear, and said :

“Aeneas, which reckless god did you follow to go and fight
 Achilles, hyperactive Achilles of outrageous daring,
 who, let’s be plain, is a better man than you, and beloved
 of the gods accordingly? Aeneas, keep away from him,
 or you will know what comes after Fate, down in awful Hades.
 When Achilles dies, then go confidently fight the foremost
 at the front : for no other Achaean shall rob you of life.”

Thus Poseidon spoke, then vanished without waiting for reply.

Monumental Achilles, meanwhile, rose to his feet, puzzled.

He had regained his sight, and with this discovered the wondrous disappearance of his opponent. While his gaze shot fast as lightning this way and that through the broil of warriors, only very slowly did he sheathe his sword, and did not start thinking until he heard the sound of the hilt touch the locket.

Achilles turned angry, and his prodigious spirit spoke out :

“Well,” he said, “my eyes saw it, so it must have happened. His spear lies in pieces at my feet, but there’s no dead man beside it. Again the Trojans have friends in high places. And I mocked him. Away with him, then! He won’t be coming round for a second try. He’s too smart for that. Let him be happy simply to have lived.

All right. Let me think, and put order into this battlefield. Not even Ἀθήνη or Athena could make sense of this mess!”

Thus spoke Achilles, who pressed on through his lines of Myrmidons, directing them to diversified positions in the fight, shaping the battlefield; and here and there he spoke out, saying :

“Come on, men! Double the intensity! If you’re suffering, you’ll know you’re doing your best! I can’t kill them all myself! Though I’m happy to give it a try! As long as you have strength, give it all! Not one blow I send out isn’t my best! Do not give way even the slightest bit! Watch me slash up their lines! I’ll make it certain no Trojan will be happy to see me!”

So he spoke, stirring them on : and shining Hector, meanwhile,
called out to his Trojans, and said he would go face Achilles :

“Fear nothing, my Trojans! Achilles cannot last forever!
Severance must come! I say it shall not be as Achilles
wants it to be! His promises will be left incomplete!
I’m going against him, even if his hands are as fire!
Even if his hands as are fire, and his strength hard as iron!”

So he spoke, stirring them on : and the Trojan army, every
last man, fixed their eyes on the Argives, and all their spears were raised.
The terrible transverberation of war pierced through the sky
and was heard far off as a rumbling of something scary,
as man against man mingled up close in a struggle furious,
and all-deciding : the showdown that leaves one alive or dead.

So as Hector pressed on through the furious combat, looking
for Achilles man-killer, Apollo of the Omen whispered
in his ear, saying :

“Hector, change your mind. By no means face champion Achilles,
not now. Fate would have him find his way to you, not the other
way round. You stay and fight with your warriors, and wait for him
to break through the combat and appear before you. Face the fate
you choose right now, and you’ll end up in a hand-to-hand encounter,
and he’ll pull his dagger, and you’ll end up dead. The way to stop
that outcome is to listen to me—Apollo.”

Thus spoke the god, and Hector was smart enough to believe him.
So he leapt into the fierce convulse of battle, spear in hand,
and faced trials of life and death over and over again.

And Achilles sprang into where the combat was densest,
 with antagonists pressed against one another in closest
 fighting, feet overlapping feet, many in death embraces;
 and in an instant Achilles left behind him bloody wreckage :
 an enemy arm drooping from sinews, and a spurting stump
 minus a hand, and a face bashed in. Achilles was ever
 at the threshold of the end of everything, yet felt at home.

Clothed in strength, he came down in front of Trojan Iphition
 (not elsewhere named), who, befuddled by the exultation
 of the enemy in his ears, didn't notice Achilles'
 sword swooping down decisively in the middle of his bronze
 helmet. Everything known of unfortunate Iphition
 is that he was the good-hearted son of Otrynteus, himself celebrated
 by men as "Destroyer of Cities", who had fathered his son
 with a Naiad Nymph amid the grapevines on Tmolus'
 fertile slopes, overlooking the beautiful pasture-grounds
 and lawns of the land of Sardis. Two more details are known
 of Iphition : he led a great army; and that Achilles
 split his head down the middle. The two bloody halves bowed outward,
 and he fell with the proverbial thud. *δῖος* Achilles
 boasted over the corpse, saying :

"I recognize you now," he said. "The son of Otrynteus.
 How low you lie now, 'Destroyer of Cities'! For you have no
 other son. So I kill two men in one; and one man in two!
 However, I recall your father's birthplace was by Gyges,
 a part of my ancestral estate—where the river Hyllus
 flows, full of fish, into the whirling waters of great Hermus.
 Son of Otrynteus, I'll apologize in Hades someday."

Thus spoke Achilles over the pieces of Iphition.

Curiously, Iphition's pieces commanded one more mention : the galloping horses of the Achaeans mashed them in the dirt, and the chariot-tires finished the affront; but no one saw anything of it amid the chaos of war.

Especially Achilles, who was sending his spear through the head of poor Demoleon, the bronze transiting across his forehead, scrambling together shattered bone and scattered brain inside his bronze helmet : thus ended the valiant effort of the son of Antenor, a tough fighter well-liked by all.

Hippodamas then approached Achilles in his chariot. The chariot then raced by Achilles, with Hippodamas clutching a spear transecting his body; and the victim breathed a fury beyond all : one could liken it to the bellow of the sacrificial bull dragged to the sacrificial altar, a sound that enhances the delight of the gift to the gods : just so did Hippodamas sigh out his spirit as he raced past Achilles, into whose hand a Myrmidon tossed a fresh spear, sleek and glittering bronze, and he aimed it at the youngest son of King Priam, the inexperienced Polydorus.

His father had forbidden his son to fight, dear as he was to his heart for being the youngest of his brood; and in races his quick feet always brought him to victory. Now here he was, in childish folly exhibiting his excellence of foot-speed by rushing alongside the foremost warriors at the front; until he died. The spear of much-faster Achilles tore through Polydorus as he ran swiftly past—in and out, just like that—

and as he ran on, he discovered his bowels spilling out
 of his mangled belly, and he cupped his hands to catch the load
 of guts; but he didn't notice the precision of the strike :
 through one of the golden clasps that held together the metal
 plates of his warrior's belt, itself just overlapped by the edge
 of the breast-plate. So the spear point ripped through the doubled-over
 armour and Polydorus fell to his knees, doubled over,
 and died while struggling to push his bowels back inside.

Shining Trojan leader Hector saw his youngest brother dead,
 doubled up in the dirt, still with his guts in his hands, all caked
 with dust. And into Hector's eyes a darkness came to settle,
 and he knew he could hold back no longer. He stalked toward
 Achilles, his gravity of presence equal to fire
 that annihilates : and he levelled his spear at Achilles :

But when δῖος Achilles saw him coming, he scowled, and said
 to himself :

"Here is the vile dog who searched into my heart, and took away
 the one I honoured. Who destroyed a good soul. And now he's here."

So he thought. Then with a terrible glare Achilles spoke out
 to him, saying :

"Hector, lower your spear. Come on, take a few more steps forward.
 Come walk your way into your death."

But, without fear, sharp-eyed Hector answered him, saying :

"Lord Achilles, don't talk to me as if I were a child.

If I cared I could send out mockery enough to compete
 with yours, and shame us both. Are you truly better than I am?
 Let us find out right now. Let us find out if all of your words
 have ever meant anything. I don't care what the gods decide—
 my spear is as sharp as yours, so watch it now fly from my hand!"

So saying, Hector drew back and cast it, but Athena Bright-
 Eyes, with one soft puff of breath, drove it away from Achilles.

Both men saw the spear fly back to Hector, who caught it, wondering.

Achilles meanwhile sprang at Hector, and in vehement haste
 drew his sword and prepared to strike the death-blow, but Apollo
 appeared yet again, just where they were, and snatched Hector from death,
 dropping a thick grey obscuring mist over and around him.

And Achilles, outrageously impatient with all the gods'
 interference in his work, leapt into the mist, not caring
 what happened, other than bringing down the outstanding Hector.

And in the swirling obscure grey, Achilles saw a body
 in the dust, and raised his sword to fight. Then he saw who it was,
 sprawled there dead at his feet, and his eyes went wide and terrible.
 So he lowered his sword, and backed out of the dark, godly mist.

Then, with a horrible look, he faced the heavens and howled.

"Have it your way, gods," he screamed, then shouted for Hector to hear :

"Again—you dog!—you escape death! Though your ending came close!
 Why Apollo would stretch all this out is a question no man

can answer, and I'm not expecting him to explain it to me.
 To Apollo Deliverer you best pray in thankfulness,
 wherever you've gone lurking in this torrent of spears.
 Add to your prayer that you would rather not meet me again!
 Gods protect us, too! Let them now watch me kill more of your men!"

This said, Achilles pushed his spear-point through the throat of Dryops,
 who fell by his feet. Achilles left him twitching there, and took
 the life of Demuchus, Philetor's son, exceedingly large
 in both heart and physique : but Achilles drew his sword and stuck
 his heart, and cut him short. Then the two sons of Bias tumbled
 out of their chariot-box, Laogonus and Dardanus;
 and as both sought to reckon what happened, Achilles killed one
 with spear, the other with sword. Tros, then, someone's son,
 wrapped both his arms round Achilles' legs, but only to beg
 for his life in a passionate babble, begging Achilles
 to spare his life, and take him prisoner, and let him live.
 Tros appealed to Achilles to show mercy to a young man
 the same age as he : and Achilles lowered his lethal sword
 while the imbecile babbled, but only to push it in
 him; and a bit of his liver popped out of his slippery
 insides. (In this way did Achilles convey his attitude
 for gentle-hearted compassion.) So young Tros' eyes went wide,
 and he sank into the dust and died, while the black blood soaked
 through his garments. Meantime, Achilles came up to Mulius
 and thrust his spear : and it went in one ear and out the other.

Echeclus, then, Agenor's son, felt a sword strike his helmet,
 then felt it sink further in, and the blade came back warm
 with his blood; and as he died he saw all the colours that come
 at the point of death, behind one's eyes, when Fate comes to close them.

Deucalion was next. The spear-point of Achilles transfixed his elbow; and as Deucalion turned his head to see him, Achilles lopped it off with his sword, and caught it with a hand. So the exposed spine poked upward, and blood spurted in time with the dying rhythm of the heart; and Achilles then hurled the head, still snug inside its helmet, off and away, kicking away the trimmed corpse, too, leaving it lying in the dirt.

Achilles then went for the excellent son of Peiroös, the noble Rhigmus, who had come with his warrior father from beautiful Thrace of the rich, deep soil. Achilles threw his spear and pierced him deep in the belly and he fell from his chariot, and his soul flew away. Then his faithful driver Areithous, attempting to flee, began to turn the horses round, but looked down to see a spear bursting through his chest. Faithfully he followed his champion down to the abysmal house of Hades, while the chariot horses ran panic-stricken and confused through the disorder.

As when a fire, blazing strong, rages in the deep hollows of a dry mountainside, and the deep forest burns, and the wind drives the flames on in whirling confusion every which way : just so, Achilles raged every which way through his enemy like a god with his glittering spear, as he pursued, and caught, and killed; and the blood gushed out, darkening the earth.

In combat, he saw that the finest warriors all lay dead around him, so he mounted chariot and changed position.

And just as a man puts two broad-browed bulls on his strong-founded

threshing floor, so that quickly the grain is shelled out from the husk,
as the loud-bellowing bulls drop their heavy hooves; just like that
did Achilles μέγ' ἄ-θυμος trample over the war-dead
with his horses' hoofs and with his chariot wheels;
and the axle under him dripped with blood, and blood dappled
his chariot all round the rims, for the horses flung back blood
at him from their racing hoofs, and his chariot tires
alike sprayed blood his way. So Achilles, son of Peleus,
strove for glory, while his unapproachable hands dripped with blood.

End of Book XX

Book XXI

So when the Trojans, fleeing δῖος Achilles' onset,
 came to the crossing of the river, the fast-flowing river
 Scamander, called by gods Xanthus, waters Zeus Father conceived,
 there Achilles severed their forces into two. And the one
 he sent fleeing over the carnage of the plain toward the city,
 where, the day before, impressive Hector had raged in frenzy
 and the Achaean army had stumbled about bewildered—
 in that direction Achilles sent a mass of Trojans running
 for their lives. So Hera, who had boasted just moments before
 of never stooping to meddle in mortal affairs, darkened
 the air with a deep-grey fog, to frustrate the Trojan retreat;
 but then another god promptly puffed it away with a breath,
 and the sun returned to scintillate on the rushing waters
 of the Xanthus, where the other half of the broken Trojan
 army found themselves trapped, with the deep-flowing river cutting
 off their flight, its rushing waters whirling round in silver eddies
 between its overhanging banks. With a commotion of splashing
 the Trojans leapt into the river, and its deep waters roared,
 and cries and shouts of Trojans came up out of all the whirling,
 spiralling waters that sent them this way and that way violently;
 and many men tried to swim, but were caught in the eddies;
 and all the noise echoed deafeningly between the steep banks.

As when at the onset of fire a swarm of locusts break
 into the air toward a river; but the untiring fire
 catches up, and burns their wings; so the locusts drop, and cower
 under the surface of the water : just so was the deep-whirling
 Xanthus filled with a muddle of men and horses and chariots
 before the eyes of Achilles.

So Zeus-born rested his heavy spear among the tamarisks
 on the bank of the river; then he dived in with godly grace,
 with sword only; and his heart took care to work monstrous
 butchery, an ill-work his victims didn't care for; and he
 turned every which way and hacked and hacked, and moaning and groaning
 arose all round as he struck with his blade, and the waters ran
 red with blood. And as little fishes flee a broad-jawed silver
 dolphin and gather in corners of a deepwater harbour
 in dread, for the dolphin takes in most everything before it :
 just like that the Trojans cowered in terror in the gushing
 waters, struggling to whatever nook or cleft of the high
 banks they might reach, to hide there, for now they were stuck.

He then lowered his hand for a moment, staying his killing.
 Instead, he plucked one young man after another up and out
 of the river, tossing twelve in all, still living, out onto
 the banks, for his Myrmidons to lead away. These twelve would serve
 as a special revenge for the death of Patroclus. He then
 followed them out, and took care that these twelve, who were huddled
 together quivering like fawns, had their hands well-fastened behind
 their backs, with leather belts donated by his men, so that their
 elegant tunics now hung loose on their enormous physiques.
 He sent these men away, with their victims, down to the black ships;
 then plunged back into the whirling waters, eager to destroy.

There in the battle he met a son of King Priam struggling
 to climb out of the whirling river current. Unfortunately
 for this man, he felt the hands of Achilles on his shoulders;
 then he experienced being flung backward into the waters.
 Indeed, it was Lycaon, whom, once upon a time, δῖος

Achilles himself had kidnapped from the king's royal gardens,
 having stolen in under dark of night. With sharp blade in hand,
 Lycaon was at work, fashioning wild fig-tree branches
 into chariot wheel rims, when evil unexpectedly
 came to him in the shape of δῖος Achilles. Lycaon,
 then, ended up as merchandise on a ship bound for island
 Lemnos, where he was sold to the son of the famous Jason,
 and Achilles fetched a nice price for his effort. A friend, then,
 Eetion, who lived on far-off island Imbros, ransomed
 him for an even higher price, and happily Eetion
 sailed for lovely Arisbe; then secretly he slipped back
 into Troy, and entered the palace of his fathers after
 many years. For eleven days now he had delighted in
 his family and its care; but now, on the twelfth day of his
 return, some god had put him back in the hands of Achilles,
 who was about to send him down abysmally to Hades,
 all unwillingly. Yes, quick-thinking fast-moving Achilles
 recognized him, a fighter unarmed, without helmet or shield,
 nor did the hero have spear in hand, for he had flung these away
 in his desperation to climb up out of whirling Xanthus,
 as his heavy sweat irritated his flight from the river,
 and weariness had weakened his limbs; and δῖος Achilles,
 with a wondrous smile, spoke out spiritedly and grim :

"Oh my goodness! Isn't it marvellous what eyes show a man!
 Will I soon be fighting all over again all those Trojans
 I've already killed? Will they all come back from the dark below?
 Considering you're in my hands right now, I should be concerned.
 Somehow this man has come back, though sold at Lemnos! And survived
 the seawaves, that hold far too many ships and men, stretching back
 to ancient times! Come now! Have a taste of this, so I may learn

whether or not you'll come back even from below,
whether Hades himself is strong enough to hold you."

So spoke Achilles, who put his hands around Lycaon's throat,
there in the whirling currents, surrounded by death :

and his victim began to babble, and garble his words :

"I beg you, Achilles, on my knees, if I could in this god-
damn shitstream—Contemplate my misfortune,
and be merciful! Recall that you and I shared the bread
of Demeter, that night you took me away from my father
and friends! Zeus-born! You know that Zeus Father
looks kindly on the guest! And when you sold me at Lemnos
I brought you the price of a hundred oxen—no small number!
And it took me three times as much to buy me back! I've only
been here twelve goddamn days and you're going to kill me?
Why must Fate not only be deadly but cruel? Do all the gods
hate me? For some reason Zeus has given me to you again!"

And now the struggle to get words out was monumental,
but he continued, as Achilles' constricting hands dragged him
down toward the deep waters :

"Pity a mother mourning her youngest son! Laio! Hoë!
Daughter of Altes! King of the long-lived Leleges! Pedasus,
holy mountain, is our home, and the Satnioeis our river!
I'm not even his goddamn son in anybody's eyes! Why
kill a bastard? Achilles, I'm not worthy of you! Priam
has fathered so many sons that to kill me will open you
to ridicule! You've already killed one! Polydorus!

Do you want to gain fame as a bastard killer? Is that glory?
 To slaughter us both? It's plain you're serious about this.
 Why some god has put me into your hands. . . ."

And Achilles immersed his victim's head into the rushing
 current, but Lycaon kept burbling speech up from under,
 his eyes open wide and upward, something like :

"Achilles godlike! Hector and I sprang from different wombs!
 He's the one who killed your friend!"

Thus spoke the royal Lycaon, bastard son of King Priam.

But Achilles hadn't cared to hear a word of it, and now held
 the man under the water cruelly, sustainedly; and said :

"Imbecile, now you're shut up forever. Shut up in darkness.
 Until Patroclus died I was happy to sit on the sidelines
 and let the Trojans live. It was more profitable to take
 you alive, friend, and sell you into slavery. But things change,
 and now no Trojan comes near me but ends up dead, and that's that.

Friend, I'm taking down every son of Priam who faces me.
 If that means all of them (all of them left), I'll leave satisfied.
 Meaning : you're dead. And what was that babble about? My friend died.
 Patroclus died, a far better man than you. So I'm afraid
 that means you die, too, whether either of us likes it or not.
 Why worry about it? Did you not see me, and feel my strength?
 My father was good, my mother a goddess. So don't feel bad
 down there. I'm fucking dead, too. I know it, but I'm not running;
 that won't do. But one dawn, or dusk, or bright middle of the day,

I'm wasted, whether from spear or arrow, who knows. And that's it."

Then, standing in whirling Xanthus, Achilles slit the man's throat,
leaking blood in the water; then let the body float away.

And Achilles watched the hands of the currents whirl the body
round and round as it rushed through splashing combat, off and away.
And all the while Achilles spoke after it :

"Go your way, friend. Let the fishes lick the blood out of your wounds.
Your mother will have to make do without a funeral bier,
and be resigned to a quiet mourning. She's the last to care
about you, except the fishes. The river will carry you
away into the wide-open sea : all kinds of fish leaping
in the waves will feast on the flesh of bastard Lycaon.

Okay. That's another killed—now for the rest. Till we reach Troy,
I'll kill every last one running from me. Has this silvery
fluency helped you cowards? Men have long said that the Trojans
toss live bulls into the water as sacrifice, and living
horses, too. Xanthus, running from Oceanus, was happy
to swallow them up. But he's not helping you yet, excited
as he looks. So while he watches I'm killing every last one
of you. You're going to keep paying for Patroclus' death,
and also for the suffering of the Achaeans, especially
all those you killed while I sat on my ass by the ships."

This Achilles said, and incensed the river down to its depths.
So now the river meditated over how to stop him,
how to restrain the hand of δῖος Achilles, to avoid
utter Trojan ruin.

Achilles, meantime, ancestral spear in hand, glittering
 telesmatic wonder glugged with death, splashed through the river
 gushing hot with blood, dead men like red leaves floating
 in and around the combat of warriors ever-reaching
 higher degrees of blind chaos inside the overhanging
 banks. In the currents was son of Pelegon, Asteropaeus,
 who had come from far Axius, where Boreas blows strongest,
 to find himself face-to-face with man-destroying Achilles.
 Periboëa, Aecessamene's eldest daughter,
 lay with the river Axius, then gave birth and life to him,
 and hoped for his return; but Achilles was coming his way,
 implacable through the staccato surges of the swirling
 waters where his mighty Myrmidonian warriors
 were eliminating Trojans left and right. Achilles, with
 repugnancy beclouding his eyes, struggled onward against
 the riverwater and all the dead bodies floating this way
 and that, to get to the son of Pelegon, Asteropaeus,
 to kill him. During this moment of time, Asteropaeus
 was noted not by δῖος Achilles only, but also
 by Xanthus, who put courage in his heart to cut Achilles
 down, for all the blood-spill had sorely angered the river god,
 and it was δῖος Achilles doing much of the spilling.
 Moreover, the fight raised the temperature of the waters,
 further aggravating whirling Xanthus. Asteropaeus,
 then, was granted a chance by the river to stop the madness,
 by bringing pitiless Achilles down. But, however mighty
 his ever-crescending stream that led back to Oceanus,
 back to origins, for Oceanus was the eldest Titan,
 Xanthus, his son, was less mighty as a judge of character,
 for the warrior he'd chosen to help him was about to die.

So when Achilles had seen Asteropaeus facing him,
 it was then that Achilles, in the midst of dividing up
 the Trojans and littering the gushing waters with body
 parts, changed direction and advanced decisively on him;
 and as they came near to one another he called out to him :

“Who are you who looks at me? Those who see me end up dead.
 You think you can take me? Your courage is going to kill you.”

Then the son of Pelegon, Asteropaeus from Axius,
 bolstered by whirling Xanthus, answered him, saying :

“Son of Peleus, Ἀχιλλεὺς μεγά-θυμος , why do
 you care who I am? Know that my family stands on rich soil,
 and my father Pelegon, all men know, was strong with the spear.
 Does that interest you, μεγά-θυμος ? Now how about these?”

Thus menacingly spoke Asteropaeus, who raised
 up two spears of Pelian ash, death in each hand, for the man
 was ambidextrous, and just now uncommonly skilful in death.
 But by the time his two arms were at their height, both of his hands
 were floating down the river, still gripping their Pelian spears.
 But the river was canny : so when the hands sprang from the man,
 one spear-point grazed Achilles’ right forearm, and dark blood gushed out.

Now poor Asteropaeus, compounded with lunatic rage,
 grappled with stumped arms round Achilles, and attempted to drag
 both of them down into the darkening vertigos. δῖος
 Achilles, though, tossed him up and out of the river, and he fell
 with a thud in the tamarisk bushes. Asteropaeus,
 in a red frenzy, spraying blood every which way, leapt back in

the river after Achilles, who sighed, grabbed a floating spear,
 and let fly at the maniac splashing in his nausea
 of distress. His own fresh wound hadn't sent the spear out any
 less perfect, but the other man's broken-spirited animosity
 blessed him with speed that evaded the true spear entirely.
 Achilles frowned to see his fatal weapon wobbling in place,
 fixed uselessly in one bank of the river. So Achilles
 now picked up a sword. Asteropaeus, meanwhile, splashed his
 way to the quivering ashwood and attempted to yank it
 out. Three times he tried this in his clumsy slippery manner;
 but, by the fourth time, when he put an arm round the bronze
 and was trying to bend and break it, an idiotic notion
 at best, Achilles was there, and killed him. Asteropaeus
 gasped out when the sword-blade slashed lengthwise along his belly,
 and more Trojan intestines spilled out into the sunlight :
 these floated on the rippling stream, bloody and elongate.
 So δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς watched Asteropaeus' eyes
 go blank. Then he spoke out, without smiling this time, saying :

"Happy now? What about that glorious lineage you spoke of?
 Did it help you? Pity you won't be buried in that rich soil.
 Let your glorious father be called the best fighter on earth,
 but I don't suppose you'll be remembered, except for a laugh."

Achilles watched Asteropaeus from Axius float away,
 and more words came from the wounded Achilles, who said :

"Goodbye. The children of Zeus Orderer are stronger
 than any sons of rivers. My father is Peleus, master
 of the Myrmidons, and his was Aeacus, son of Zeus.
 But sons of rivers float away on the river. Now you know.

Not even this river can challenge Zeus. Not even river
 Achelous flowing into Corinthian Gulf. Not even
 deep-flowing Oceanus has strength enough to fight me,
 though all rivers stream from him down into every sea,
 though he fills our deep wells, and keeps the springs flowing
 with fresh water for us to drink. But even Oceanus
 fears the thunder of Zeus, when it comes crashing down from heaven.”

Thus δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς , and yanked out his spear from the grip
 of the riverbank. Meantime, the body of Asteropaeus
 rushed away on the riverwater darkening around him,
 receding from the plain and the sea immense beside it.
 Already the eels and fishes were working on him, and soon
 would feed on the fat of his kidneys, and slowly erode him
 down to nothing.

Then Ἀχιλλεύς came down on the Paeonians, leaving
 behind him, implicated in the whirling eddies, a mass
 of dead men and chariots overturned and whatever else.
 First they’d witnessed their leader and best man left for the fishes
 to consume; next they themselves experienced first-hand what Fate
 had waiting for them from the outset : the son of Peleus
 easily overmastering them, killing Thersilochus
 τε Mydon τε Astypylus τε Mnesus τε Thrasius
 τε καὶ Aenius ἢδ’ Ophelestes. He’d have killed them all,
 but Xanthus chastised him shrilly in his ears, roaring from out
 of the deep-whirling depths :

“Ο Ἀχιλλεύς μεγά-θυμος ! Beyond all men in strength,
 beyond all men in evil! Yet the gods are forever with you!
 If Zeus shall have you kill every man in Troy, kindly kill them

elsewhere. All the blood in my beautiful waters is the least of it. You are blocking my throat with bodies. You're choking me, and I can't clear my way to the heavenly sea. And yet you keep killing and clogging me, too-destructive Ἀχιλλεύς !
So come now! Get out! In days to come, they shall call the lifetime of earth-borns, even yours, first of men : 'implicitum malum'!"

And quick-thinking Ἀχιλλεύς answered him :

"Whatever you're saying, it shall be as you ask, Scamander : soon they'll be no one left for you to swallow in your waters!
(Think of these men as flocks of birds, staining the temples of gods.)
I'll go wherever, kill whomever, until I get to Hector.
Then that will be that."

So saying, he continued his god-appointed killing work.

As not all gods under heaven approved of Ἀχιλλεύς ,
Xanthus next spoke to Apollo of the laurel leaf, saying :

"ὦ πόποι ! Prophetic Apollo! Who would have envisioned your repudiation of Zeus' Word? Is not Time's command for you to stand by the Trojans and protect them until dusk?
Just now the sun is bright. The evening star has not yet appeared, and darkness is not yet spreading over the earth. So where are you?"

And so Ἀχιλλεύς was watched by the river, during the time while he was scaling a bank in pursuit : and so it was that Achilles himself now felt a hard blow upon his shoulders, and the river ripped him off the bank and flung him back in raging waters. Then the river roused all its currents to

join as one colossal swell, and the waters brushed aside the
 corpses of dead men floating on its rippling surface, and
 left them, all those warriors killed by Ἀχιλλεύς μεγά-θυμος ,
 to pile up in sodden heaps atop the overhanging banks.
 And all the while the river bellowed, deep and guttural,
 like a bull; and as for the Trojans still living in its streams,
 the river preserved them in safety in its concavities,
 protecting them from Ἀχιλλεύς , hiding them within its
 many whirlpools, deep and dark. It was a horrible vision
 for Ἀχιλλεύς to see : the waters rose up on all sides
 around him and began to curve inward, over and upon
 him; and the god-artist's shield in hand was no use to him now,
 so he whirled it up and out of the river channel; then he
 followed it, diving through a sheet of water, struggling to
 get to riverside; and δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς reached out and
 put his fingers round a branch of a well-rooted elm tree; but
 the river smashed it away with gushing water, uprooting
 the tree; and it tore away from the earth overlooking
 the turbulent riverwaves; and its trunk, strong-branched, tumbled
 into the channel, and dammed up the river, wide though it was.
 So the river shoved Ἀχιλλεύς into the claws of the trees,
 and the branches clutched at him as the water rose up to his
 neck; but (requiring more effort than expected), he broke free,
 and dove through the sheet of water; and the next Xanthus knew,
 Ἀχιλλεύς μεγά-θυμος was standing at riverside,
 gasping for breath. Then, admittedly feeling fear, he began
 running for the safety of the plain; but the river wasn't
 done with him. Its black waters streamed down on him from above,
 for the river hoped to delay Ἀχιλλεύς' slaughter
 of the Trojans, and rescue those it kept in its watery
 crevasses. But fast-moving son of Peleus boosted his

pace to his fastest, moving as swift as the black-eyed eagle,
the mightiest hunter of all winged things, and the quickest :
just as the eagle flies, so ran δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς .

His armour clattered round his body as he fled toward the plain.
But Xanthus came on just as quick and was catching up to him
from behind; and δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς heard its gigantic
roar.

Though the sound of water is murmurous, when irrigated
through well-dug channels developed in a man's gardens,
when the mud is cleared from the trenches, dug out with a mattock;
and as the water glides over its pebbles, and slopes down a
rise, it outpaces even the worker who is leading it—

In this way the roaring riverwater caught up to δῖος
Ἀχιλλεύς no matter how 'fast-moving' he was among
men; for the gods are stronger than men. So, as he ran, δῖος
Ἀχιλλεύς found himself immersed in a tidal flood of
water, and felt his feet lift up off the ground; but he thrust his
spear down, fixing it into the earth, and hung there holding on
for dear life in the heavenly flood coming from above, and
filling his throat. And Ἀχιλλεύς was turning concerned, as
the flood seemed to have no ceasing, but kept beating down on him
in an immersive tormenting stream that held him back from breath.
Not much longer would he endure holding himself suspended
in this pocket of whirling Xanthus, who had cut away the
ground under his feet.

Son of Peleus looked up to see sky and heaven covered
over with riverwater, and laments whispered through his mind :

“Zeus Father! No god sees me in this miserable shitstorm?
 Well, it will be as it is. But it’s fucked. As for the gods up
 on Olympus, I don’t blame them so much—but my mother!
 Why did my mother babble garbage about my dying in
 combat? Did she not say I would fall by the walls, under the
 hyper-quick arrows of Apollo? Better that Hector kill me,
 the best of them here : then I’ll be remembered
 as a courageous man who took on the best there is, now and
 forever. But this? This is the pathetic end that Destiny
 had saved for me? Drowned in a river? Like some swineherd’s boy,
 taken by the water when trying to cross it in winter?”

Thus were what δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς presumed might be his last
 thoughts. But Poseidon and Athena came close to his sides,
 and he saw their shapes, produced as hollows in the water, where
 the streams ran round their figures, and in his ear he heard the voice
 of Poseidon :

“Son of Peleus, Achilles, stay calm, and feel no fear, for
 you have helpers from above here with you now. No, ‘drowned in a
 river’ is not to be your end. Soon this stops, and you’ll know it
 when it does. But listen now to what I tell you : your hands are
 not to stop killing until you’ve penned up them all—every last
 one still alive—inside the walls of glorious Troy. You will
 kill Hector, have no fear of missing out on that. Then return
 to the ships, where we will give you just what you want.”

So they spoke, then stepped away, the Immortal Ones;
 and Achilles felt his feet touch ground. So he struggled through the
 torrential stream of Xanthus, and broke through, and saw the open plain

of Scamander before him. And he began to run again,
 pushing against the tide, picking up speed in an effortful
 battle, now his torso, now his waist, emerging from the current
 until he was mostly free again, and running at the fastest
 pace of his life, whether from fear, or from the will of the gods.

And so δῖος Achilles ran, with no one now before him.
 And he felt all on his own again. And up ahead he saw :

The entire plain was underwater. Floating on the dark
 flood were the many bodies of the dead men, the sad men,
 cut down in the prime of their years and physical strength,
 all the fine warriors killed in battle.

Achilles kept on straight, leaping over the drifting dead men,
 while the flood-line began rising from his ankles to his knees;
 yet still he ran with a wondrous speed, splashing through the dead
 and the rising waters, for Athena had inspired both
 his spirit and physical being with strength. So he ran, and
 leapt over bodies and all the fine weaponry abandoned
 by the dead; and Scamander kept overflowing the plain from
 behind him, spilling in even angrier than earlier,
 angry at the son of Peleus. But the god could not stop
 the strength of his will. And Achilles held straight,
 while the plain held the growing weight of the heavy sheet of water.

So the fleeing son of Peleus put the River into
 deepening agitation; thus Xanthus, streaming in behind,
 lifted himself up as a wave that crested high as birds fly;
 and spoke out to his fellow river god, Simois, saying :

“Friendly brother, shall we unite and stop this man, this earth-born?

If we don’t, he’s to crush the city that has stood by us for aeons.

The entire Trojan army lacks the power to withstand him.

(I admit he needs the two of us to stop him, the earth-born!)

Let’s take him a different way. Pour out all of the waters
from all of your springs into your stream. Fill yourself to over-
flow. Bring all the channels of your riverbed to agitation.

And do it now! Raise a huge wave, and carry with you tree-trunks
and boulders and rocks and branches, and push forward!

Let us end this wild man, who is intent on competing
with gods, who shall always be superior in all ways,
obviously. Does he truly believe the bodily strength
of a man can save him from us both? To prove our point, we shall
spoil all his beauty. All that beautiful armour of his
shall end up at the bottom of the sea, lying covered in mud.

As for the man, I shall wrap a shroud of sand around his figure,
and pile up on him an immeasurable number of grains
of sand and pebbles together, so the Achaeans will never
find his bones : just so deep will I bury him in mud and slime
from above. We shall make his tomb ourselves, to save his friends from
the effort of gathering up a mound for funeral rites.”

And so he foamed up in commotion on high, surging against
Achilles, at his chest now; yet still Achilles ran, as if
through resistible air, and the many dead men rose up round
him on the boils of foamy water inmixing with blood.

So the streams behind him gathered up into a swell, rising
to the height of heaven, the very streams fed by Zeus Father’s
rainfall that drops from heaven, though Zeus figured
in Achilles’ own family, as his great-grandfather—

but who can say why the gods let be as they do?
 So the river-gods loomed over him, ready to come down
 and stop the son of Peleus.

Then Queen Hera cried out in fear for Achilles, wishing him
 safe from deep-whirling Xanthus. Straightaway she made her voice heard
 to her beloved son Hephaestus :

“Come now, club-foot, my child! You must fight
 whirling Xanthus! You’ve been chosen as the fair equivalent
 for this challenge. Go now, firestarter, protect my son!
 Show yourself in all of your blazing fire!

I shall awake from the sea a rushing West Wind,
 and a cold South that shall clear the sky of all cloud,
 so that your flames may occupy the air exclusively.
 The winds shall carry your fire along, incinerating
 the dead Trojan heads and their armour. You will bring
 the line of fire to the banks of the riverbed. There, you
 will burn down his trees, and clear out his space with your fire;
 and listen to none of his words, whether meek or threatening;
 just do not stop your noble blazing until I cry out to you;
 only then you may restrain the unresting fire.”

Thus spoke the queen of heaven, and artist-god Hephaestus
 prepared his god-fire. First, he lit a flame across the plain.
 When it burned sufficient, the fire consumed all the dead men,
 the many kills of Achilles. And all the heavy water
 smoked away from the battlefield, and the broad Scamander Plain
 was parched (but not scorched), as the sun-twinkling riverwater
 evaporated on the clear air, just as the North Wind breathes

on freshly-watered gardens, drying them lightly, and the man
 who cuts the soil is glad; just so simply did the god dry the plain;
 and he cremated all the dead. Then he guided his fire
 toward the River. His all-shining fire burned the elms and willows
 and the tamarisks; burned the lotus, and the rushes, and all
 the fragrant grasses that grew in abundance round the river
 and its streams. In all their channels the eels and fishes were vexed,
 and they plunged about, head foremost, in arcs, here and there along
 the streams, singed by the hot breath of πολύμητις Hephaestus.

Burned also was bold river Xanthus, who called out to the god,
 the fire-setting god, by name :

“Hephaestus! Really now, none of us here can move against you!
 I will not fight you, though you blaze madly. And how quickly
 you reach sufficient temperature! (I see a halo of fire-glow
 around your figure.) Please now, stop these terrible flames of yours!
 And have Ἀχλλεὺς get the Trojans out of my waters!
 He can reduce the city to a handful of dust for all I care!
 Why would I concern myself with a wild man’s affairs?”

Thus spoke Xanthus, smothered in fire, his beautiful waters
 boiling up and foaming over; and his fumes rose to heaven
 as breath on the wind. And as a cauldron boils inside itself
 when beset by rampageous fire, bedevilled by the flames
 whipping beneath; and it breathes out the savour of sacrifice
 as the fat of a victim melts down inside, and it bubbles
 all over, as fresh parcels of dry wood are set under it :
 just so, the fire surged in his channels, and the waters boiled.
 So he lost the will to flow further, and the riverwater
 came to a stop; and all currents were stilled. Thus was the river

worn down by the hot breath of the inventive one, Hephaestus.
The violence of the god-artist's ingenious fire scared him.

So, with whining words, he appealed to queen of heaven Hera :

"Hera, why is your son here to bring misery to me? It's
more pain than any other Immortal has ever given me.
Why single me out for punishment? What faults have I done you
in this war, compared to all those other collaborators
with the Trojans? At your request, honoured queen, I will cease all
interactions with the god. But may he, too, cease all with me!
I give you my solemn promise I will not lift a finger
to hinder the Day of Death when it comes for the Trojans.
Not when the lofty city shall eviscerate up in flames,
when the war-loving sons of the Achaeans light the fires."

Thus, when Hera heard this from Xanthus, she straightaway revealed
her voice to Hephaestus, and called out to her beloved son :

"Hephaestus, my ingenious son! Enough! Let us no further
mistreat an Immortal in this way on account of a man."

Thus spoke Hera, and Hephaestus reduced his wondrous flame
until it was extinguished. And then again the fair waters
of the river Xanthus rushed down through its meandering channels.

So when that was that, and Fire and Water had each gone his
separate way, for Hera had restrained them, still she was angry
about something. Many of the gods were down on the battlefield;
and there in the amniotic air they transformed into chaos.

Not only was the convocation of majesties itself divided,
 but the spirit of each god was divided, too : in doubt over
 what was what with things at the moment. Thus the heated passions
 of the earth-borns had spilled over into the hearts of the gods,
 and squabbling and quarrel fell upon the Olympians,
 and then contention more painful. In diverse and contrary
 ways the heavy winds of war roared through the spirits of the gods.

They fell on one another with a tremendous percussive
 crash, and the whole earth resounded with the sound;
 and heaven heard the fighting, clear as the blast of a trumpet.

And high on the heights of Olympus Zeus Father heard, and laughed.
 Zeus laughed to see the delightful sight of chaos beneath him.

Down below, Ἄρης shield-piercer charged at Athena, speaking words
 full of hate :

“Why, dog-face, must you be forever causing trouble with the gods?
 Why such confidence in your Reason? Especially when one
 considers the fact that you can open a door of your heart
 and Chaos spills out! Bright-Eyes, you’re all contradiction.
 You think I’m going to forget the time you directed that spear
 sent by Tydeus’ son Diomedes, and drove it into me?
 So now I shall punish you in full for what you did to me.”

Thus saying, Ἄρης used his gargantuan physical force
 to strike the tasselled aegis she held before her as a shield.
 But not even Zeus’ lightning can scar it. Still, Athena
 stepped back from her blood-dripping brother, and quickly her eyesight
 fastened on the most handy jagged stone in her field of vision :

it was large and dark and roughly pointed, what men long ago had used as a boundary stone for a field, but was now just a rock again. With it Athena struck her impetuous brother in the throat, and his body went slack. Tremendously he fell onto the dirt, and the whole earth echoed with his fall, and dust whirled around his body, which overspread a great space, and his armour clattered round his limbs. And Athena Bright-Eyes laughed, exulting at his collapse with winged words, saying :

“Imbecile! Perhaps someday you will come to understand how much more powerful I am than you, and how pathetic is your any challenge to me. Now, in your dream-state, you shall meet the Furies, the snake-haired ones your mother summoned for you, for you’re insufferably blind, arrogant, and insolent, and fight in defence of the know-nothing Trojans!”

Thus spoke Athena, who then averted her bright eyes.

So Aphrodite came to Ἄρης , and knelt, and took his hand, and with many whispers sought to arouse him from his stupor, but the god lay stretched on the earth, groaning numerous mumblings.

Hera then spoke to Athena :

“ὦ πόποι ! Athena, invincible child of Zeus, look and see how the bitch takes ‘man-destroying’ Ἄρης off the field of battle, unthinkingly through the confusion of combat! No, child! Go get her!”

Thus spoke Hera. So Athena, in complete peace of mind, rushed for Aphrodite, and smacked her on her breasts with her powerful

fists. And Aphrodite felt her lovely knees loosen under her;
 and she lost all heart to act. So now Love and War lay collapsed
 in the dirt one upon another; and laughing over them
 Athena boasted :

“Well then! In this way shall be all who follow the Trojan way,
 when they raise arms to fight the armoured Argives. See my sister
 Aphrodite lying as if dead beside Ἄρης, the two
 of them swimming in blood! They came to learn they cannot beat me.
 I’m stronger than both physical strength and heartfelt desire :
 I am Mind. If all the Achaeans had clear minds, the effort here
 would be complete, and Troy would be reduced to dust.”

So spoke Athena, and Hera, queen of heaven, smiled.

Meantime, Poseidon Earth-Shaker turned to healer Apollo
 and spoke, saying :

“Φοῖβος, let’s you and I stand away from the others, and let
 them fight it out. On the other hand, it’s disgraceful to watch
 such a contest without interfering. And if we go back
 to Olympus without fighting, we’ll open ourselves up to
 ridicule. You begin, since you’re the younger. I’ll watch a bit,
 being the older and more experienced. Little child!
 Do you need a reason to fight the Trojans? You make me think
 of what I do not want to think! Have you forgotten how great
 we suffered way back when? When Zeus sent us here as labourers?
 Laomedon was king here, and I endured working for him for
 a year’s pay, taking his commands and directing of my work.
 Truly now, a better wall once sheltered Troy, high, beautiful,
 and (I had thought) indestructible. Do you not remember

herding my twist-horned cattle in the valleys and woods of Ida?
 That was when I was building this wall; and when the seasons turned
 round to the end of my hire, then—imagine it!—the king
 sent us away without our pay, and threatened us. He said
 he would tie us hand and foot and sell us overseas in strange
 places. Oh yes, he also promised to lop off our ears if
 we made any problems. So, for all the work we did—well, I
 was here, you were herding the cattle—we went away angry
 that he'd been so vile to us, and not paid us as he'd promised.
 These are his people you favour, by standing on the sidelines
 without fighting. I say bring this arrogant, overbearing,
 implacably idiotic race of Laomedon down,
 bring it to its knees; and eradicate them entirely
 from the earth, all their children and women, too!"

And to all this Apollo Foreseer, shooter from afar,
 answered shortly, saying :

"Count me out, Earth-Shaker. I'm too smart to mingle
 with earth-borns. They're not worthy of the lifting of a finger.
 They're like leaves that flame bright, nourished by the earth, only to die,
 and waste to dust quickly enough. No, thank you. Let's just as quick
 go away, and leave them to fight out what they wish on themselves."

Thus spoke Apollo with a grimace. The thought of raising
 a hand in violence against his uncle was distasteful.

But his sister cut him with scathing words, the queen of wild
 animals, of the hunt, the chase, and the capture, Artemis :

"You tiptoe away from Poseidon, and give up the victory

so easily? You give him glory for achieving nothing?

Child! That bow you boast of is best only for windy
twangs from your pinkie! Never again shall any Immortal
believe that you are courageous enough to fight Poseidon!"

Thus spoke Artemis, and Apollo said nothing in reply.

But her words angered Zeus' honoured wife, the queen of heaven,
who responded to the arrow-shooter with venomous words :

"How is it you are minded to come against me, you vile bitch?
If you fight against me I will crush you, though you be a bow-
bearing bitch. Zeus removed all femininity from you and
stuffed a lion in your figure. What pleasure can there be in
killing something that cannot fight back? And you enjoy picking
off innocent victims! Why would such power bring you pleasure?
How strange you are! How angry, now needy. Go return to your
mountains places, and pursue your defenceless things, and kill them
with your darts! Why do you feel better about yourself when you
kill a tender deer from afar, you rotten little fuckless peacock?
You wish to match your pathetic strength against mine? Come on then,
your vile bitch!"

And with these godly words Hera took hold of Artemis'
left wrist with her left hand, and with her right hand she
smacked both cheeks of her face with a hard open palm,
and tore away her bow from her shoulders in one manic yank;
and Hera, smiling all the while, smacked her in the head
on this side and that, as she turned first this way, then the other,
and all the arrows spilled out of her quiver. The previously
tough Artemis, tearful now, her limits exposed, fled in haste,

as a dove swoops into a hollow crack of darkness in a rock,
to hide out from a hawk, or falcon; and Destiny would not
have the dove taken just now. So, all in tears, bold Artemis
rushed away, leaving bow and arrows behind her where they lay.

Then Hermes, slayer of hundred-eyed Argus, bent to Leto,
goddess of motherhood, and spoke, saying :

“Leto, this is lunacy. Why solicit unnecessary trouble?
And I’m not trading blows with the goddess of motherhood!
I don’t mind you enjoying a little titter with the gods,
speaking out boldly that you smote me with your awesome power.”

So spoke the messenger of the gods. So Leto gathered up
the graceful bow, and all the arrows that had fallen helter-
skelter in a whirl of dust. When she had all her daughter’s things,
she left the battlefield hang-dog, and withdrew up to Heaven.

And her girl came into Olympus, and moved across its bronze
floors, and, all humiliated, full of tears, sat on Zeus’ lap,
and her finely-woven garments breathed sweet scents as they
rustled. Smiling, Zeus took her into his arms and
embraced her, and asked of her, as if he didn’t already
know the answer : “Why the Olympian dissension down there?”

Then answered Artemis, goddess of the noisy chase and kill :

“Your wife smacked me, father. Stepmother Hera, queen of heaven.
She brings chaos, and encourages dissension among the gods.”

So she began to tell him all about it, embellishing here,

leaving out crucial points there, all the while hoping for sympathy.

Thus, in this way, father and daughter spoke together on high.

But the artful god of healing, Apollo, entered into sacred Troy. He assessed the integrity of the stone wall protecting the city, worried that the Argives might outdistance Destiny, somehow, and lower Troy to its foundations this day, though that was not yet to be so. (Even Olympians live with mysteries and open questions.) Meanwhile, the other gods, those who live forever, withdrew from the Scamander Plain and returned to glimmering heaven, some burning in anger, some beaming in delight, and together sat with Zeus Father, who leaves all words meant to describe him imprecise and obscure, as he is god of dark clouds, and himself is dark as those clouds.

Achilles earth-born continued his attack on Troy, killing his way through men and horses alike : just as embered smoke climbs up to heaven from a burning city, and the cruel gods allow the flames to run free, causing the people terrible anxiety and woe : just so did Achilles bring horror and disaster to the Trojans.

And old King Priam came to stand atop the wall, to survey Achilles routing his army on the plain, monstrous Achilles. Priam saw his warriors all in confusion and retreat : their strength looked inadequate against the enemy onslaught.

And old Priam uttered a groan, conveying deep suffering and loss; and slowly he descended the stairs down to the ground, and then he waved for one of the gate-keepers to come to him,

and he spoke out, saying :

“Achilles comes this way, driving our army wildly back.

Disaster is coming to our city. But keep the gates wide open until all our people have returned. Our warriors will be moving fast, so take care as they stream in. Then, when they are here, you must shut the gates, and cover them with the wooden doors, tightly bolted. Even then this baneful man might get inside somehow.”

Thus spoke the king.

So they loosened the bonds, and pushed back the bolt, and the two gates swung open; and the open space there promised deliverance.

The keepers of the gate saw the Trojan army approaching in clouds of dust, and the warriors looked pale and filthy; and their dry tongues were coated in dust; and their throats ached with thirst; but δῖος Achilles pursued them with single-minded fury, miraculous blood-dripping spear in hand. The motivating rage in his heart to destroy was immeasurable. Winning glory for his heroism was out of his mind just now, as madness, enraging his heart, made violence his sole pursuit.

Lord Apollo, during this, stood near, as in the adyt of one of his temples, prepared to bring aid to the Trojans.

And the time for help was now, as the Argive army, charging behind crazy Achilles, was heading for the city walls.

But the Trojan army was still streaming in, and the command was to keep the tall gates wide open.

Just then the Achaeans would have taken Troy, and that would have

been that, had not Φοῖβος Apollo nudged noble Agenor,
 Antenor's son, a strong and excellent warrior. The god
 put courage in the earth-born's heart, then stood beside him,
 leaning against the old oak, hidden behind the light of things.
 So Agenor stopped in his flight, and caught sight of Achilles
 destroyer of cities, and his heart boiled up with surges
 of conflicting thoughts. Inside his disquieted mind he thought :

“ ὦ μοι ! If I run from crazy Achilles along with the rest,
 he'll catch up to me, and in my cowardliness cut my throat!
 I could leave all these to it. I could run behind the city,
 then keep going till Ida, and bury myself in bushes,
 and then just wait. Then when night comes I can wash in the river
 and cool myself of this sweat. Later on I can think over
 coming back to Troy. But why all this thinking instead of action?
 Because that plan is as rubbish as the other. He'll see me
 running, and overtake me, and end me. Death and Fate are sure
 to lurk wherever Achilles is, for he is beyond all men.
 On the other hand, what if I go out in front of the eyes
 of everyone, and meet him face to face? Surely his skin gets
 cut by sharp spears like the rest of us? Surely he has only
 one life to lose—so one is all it will take to win victory!
 That said, everyone here knows that Zeus Father is on his side.”

So ran the thoughts of Agenor, who at last decided to
 wait for war, and rush at Achilles and fight. As a leopard
 slinks out of a deep thicket in the face of a hunter,
 and has no fear, and holds her ground at the noise of barking dogs;
 and though the man is quick with the spear and rips through her flesh;
 and though wounded, still the leopard pursues victory until
 she seizes the hunter, or is killed : just so did Agenor,

excellent warrior, refuse to retreat until he faced
 Achilles. So he waited, holding up his well-balanced shield.
 He aimed his spear at Achilles, and called out to him, saying :

“Glorious Achilles! You strive to touch ancient Troy today?
 Imbecile! For all the pain you’ve caused shall fall back on you!
 The warriors inside the city have an edge over you—
 they must fight before the eyes of their parents and wives and sons
 to defend Troy! Come now, crazy man, and walk into your death!”

So he spoke, and his strong hand let fly, and hit him just below
 the knee, and the new-made leg-guard of tin clanged out with godly
 sound, and the spear-point bounced off it, and left not even a mark;
 for the gift from the artist was no inconsiderable gift.

Achilles then charged at Agenor with furious intent
 to kill. But Apollo Rescuer denied him this. The god
 removed Agenor from combat, and let him scurry away
 from war to live out the rest of his life in peace and quiet.
 Apollo then taught Peleus’ son a lesson in power.
 He shifted his shape into the form of mortal Agenor,
 and, as expected, Achilles continued his lethal charge
 after him. Apollo led him through standing wheat, then onward
 toward the river, the deep-whirling streams of Xanthus Scamander;
 and subtle Apollo kept Achilles just out of his reach,
 so that his pursuer ever hoped, mistakenly, to be
 catching up : just another humiliation from the gods,
 this one from Φοῖβος Apollo on δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς .

Meanwhile, the Trojan army crowded into the city.
 They streamed through the open gates, and warriors filled all the streets.

None thought to remain outside the city walls, to assist those
still living but faltering; and also to learn of the dead;
but eagerly they streamed though the gates into the city,
all whose legs and feet could carry them off the battlefield safe.

End of Book XXI

Book XXII

They, then, cowering in the city like fawns, in grim retreat
 flocked together in the streets, cooling off the sweat after all
 their cruel work; and they drank, to allay their terrible thirst;
 and many lay back against the high wall, exhausted, knowing
 now the limit of their strength, and averse to learn any more.
 But on the other side of the wall the Achaeans kept coming,
 their heavy bronze shields steady against their shoulders.

δῖος Hector alone stood outside the gates of the city,
 waiting where he was for Achilles to come; understanding
 nothing of how entangled he was in all-consuming Fate.
 He stood there silent before the lofty Scaean gate of Troy.

Meanwhile, bored finally of their chase, Φοῖβος Apollo
 berated the heroic son of Peleus, Achilles :

“Why chase me, son of Peleus, even with quick feet,
 when you can never catch me? For you are made of dust,
 and I am ambrosial, immortal. Now you know. Just how long
 was it going to take you to recognize things as they are?
 All that furious pursuit to catch up to me was absurd.
 Meanwhile, you let the Trojan army slip through your fingers.
 When you could have crushed them, now they stand gathered in the city,
 protected by the walls, while you stand on your own wherever!
 You cannot overtake me, because I cannot be over-
 taken. Gods cannot be outrun; I’ll always be before you.
 And you surely can’t kill me. I’m not the one destined to die.”

Then all enraged responded quick-moving Achilles :

“You deceived me, Apollo swindler! Why must you make use of
 deceit when all’s been rigged from the outset? Is that dignity,
 you most destructive of gods—to make me lose my direction?
 I was at the wall, and now I’m at this isolated place!
 You just saved the lives of too many Trojans to count. They would
 have entered Troy dead, if only I’d been there. But you allow
 those people, those weeds, to flourish. You stole victory from me.
 You can do what you like because you know I cannot answer you.
 How easy for you to win, when there is nothing you can lose!
 But if all the benefits of the gods were at my service,
 if I had powerful friends, too, you would be at my command!”

Thus spoke fearless Achilles, and left for the city with proud
 heart, confident on his feet, running as a prize-winning horse
 crosses the plain; ever so swiftly ran Achilles, who worked
 his arms and legs and feet with wondrous agility.

And old King Priam was first to see him coming. Even with
 his old eyes he saw the all-shining blaze transiting the plain
 like a shooting star : like the bad star that rises in autumn,
 and conspicuously glows its ill-omened light in the dead
 of night, the star men call the Dog of Orion. Most brilliant
 of shining stars in the sky, it yet foreshadows many
 scorching fevers that must come to miserable dust-made men.
 Such was the brilliance of the gleaming now crossing the plain,
 as the sun flashed off the god-artist’s armour round the body
 of Achilles as he ran.

And old Priam uttered a groan, conveying deep suffering
 and loss; and pulled at what hair he had on his head.

High, then, he raised his hands, praying that his eldest son Hector not go forth to meet crazy Achilles before the city walls.

So the old man reached out for his son, and spoke miserably :

“Please, Hector, my son, come inside. Do not wait to face that man alone. He brings a quick death to all who meet him. Terrible to say, but he will kill you, for he is stronger than you are, and much crueller. Why the gods don’t have the hate I have for him, I cannot say. What a sight it would be to see Achilles brought low at my feet! Let him lie unburied, for the vultures and dogs of Troy to pick at him, ripping his flesh from his bones! Ah, then would some measure of grief leave my soul, for that vile man has taken many fine sons from me—killing them outright, or selling them as slaves in far-away places. Do you see Lycaon? Is Polydorus with us? I do not see them shut in with the rest. They were born of Laoltoë, a queen among women. Perhaps they live as hostages in the camp of the enemy? Then let us release them! With gifts of bronze and gold! Our palace is full of treasure—I’ll pay whatever it takes. Or are they dead? Perhaps they abide now in the house of Hades. Their mother and I will feel great sorrow if this is so. But worse of all would be for you to leave me, Hector. Not at Achilles’ hand! That cannot be! Come inside the walls, my son, and stand as leader of the Trojan men and Trojan women. Do not give your life over to that crazy Achilles! All Trojans will suffer his boasts of triumph! Is all that not bad enough for you? Consider then the sorrows of the father! It’s incredible to me that I have come to this : to see my family being destroyed before my eyes. I have lived to see this? Zeus will have me, too—have me killed at the far end

of my life; but not until my suffering is sufficient
 for him, not until I've lived to see all my sons die, and my
 daughters dragged away, and all our ancestral treasures taken
 away. But why stop there? Let them take our babies, too, and dash
 their brains against the dirt! And drag off my dead sons' wives as well!

As for me, there's nothing for it but my own watchdogs, those I
 raised at table, who sat guarding our doors—faithful to the end,
 they'll clean me up, licking away all the blood from my body,
 dead there lying in the doorway of my palace.

What a difference between young and old! Dying in war,
 even if the sharp bronze does its worst, does not disgrace a young
 warrior. Dying in combat is honourable, whatever is seen.
 But when the dogs work on the old men, insulting the grey hair
 and beard, then everyone looks away in shame."

Thus old King Priam, who beat at his head with his fists, and tugged
 at his hair. But the brave heart of Hector would not be convinced.

Then, in her long, grand robe, Hector's mother Hecuba came near,
 letting tears fall in sight of her son. And she loosened the robe
 round her body, and spread it wide across her chest, exposing
 her breasts. Then, through her tears, she spoke to him, saying :

"Hector, child, feel shame before this sight, where once you suckled,
 when you were little and frail, and I cared for you, with love.
 With your tiny eyes shut you slept on my breast, free of all pain.
 My child, remember all my care, and all my protection!
 All I ask of you is to consider what you're deciding
 for yourself. Better you protect all your people from inside

the wall, and beat back the Argives from that position, than stand here and wait for the coming of Achilles, to face off with him until one of you is dead. Who has ever heard of a man crueller than he? If Achilles cuts you down, there will be no funeral, no bier, no lament—for all of us will lie dead with you. I, your mother, who gave you precious life! And your wife Andromache, beautiful in all ways, will lose that beauty, when she is sold into slavery amid tears, and sent far. And what solace will we have in knowing you ended as food for the stray dogs of Troy? No, child, come inside the city.”

Thus the two of them, the aged parents of champion Hector, pleaded with, prayed to, and finally begged their beloved son.

But Hector stood his ground. He would not be moved by any words. He waited where he was for monstrous Achilles to come close.

Just as a snake, coiled up in a hole in the mountains, waits patiently for a man to stray by; and fortifies its venom by feeding on herbs of poison and evil, and a dread rage to strike out with its fangs overcomes the serpent, who coils ever tighter in the dark of its hole as it patiently waits :

Even so did Hector stand where he was, indisturbable, with no thought of retreat. Far off as yet was the blinding blaze of Achilles racing forward. So Hector leaned his heavy shield on the foundation of the Scaean tower behind him.

Then, feeling each word with a heaviness of soul, he spoke out to his own great-hearted spirit, saying :

“ὦ μοι ! In no way will I go within the city and hide!

Polydamas would be the first down below to heap loathing
on me. If I had listened to him the other night we’d be
facing them down at their ships right now, not here on our doorstep.
I ignored all that strategizing of his, and this is where
we’ve come to.”

And he watched the star of Achilles growing ever-larger
on the plain before him, while continuing his thought :

“My leadership has brought my people to this point—I must pay
the consequences. There is no choice to be made here. I won’t
have men forevermore say that ‘Hector, in blind confidence,
destroyed everything he was!’ Better for me to wait for crazy
Achilles, and fight him here before the eyes of everyone.
And one of us will live, and one of us will die.”

And now followed Hector’s final thoughts on his situation,
as the bronze star swelled in size before him, and brilliant rays
crawled round its form :

“Or, what if I lean my spear against the wall, and leave my shield
and helmet with it, and go meet δῖος Achilles unarmed,
and promise to return Helen to the sons of Atreus,
and all the wealth Alexandros brought back with her on his ships,
all that frivolousness that started everything terrible :
all that the sons of Atreus can have back, to take back with them
on their ships, and their army can go wherever it came from.
If that’s not enough, the city promises to portion out,
from all the city holds, a considerable recompense.
If that’s not enough, I will ensure that the Trojans conceal

nothing of their property, by taking solemn oaths before
the elders, so that we shall hand over half the city's store
of precious wealth. Hector! Stop! What are you talking about?
If I walked up to him he would be pitiless, and show me
no regard at all, but kill me, just like that, a woman's death
—unarmed. What? Do I expect us to converse like girl and boy
dallying under an oak tree or by a rock—boy and girl?—
I must be mad! There is no way back, only one way forward :
charge at him, and challenge him, and be done with it.
Then we will know for certain which of us Olympus supports."

So debated Hector at heart, as Achilles approached him
with ancient spear raised over his right shoulder, ready to cast
his harrowing weapon of deadly Pelian ash through Hector's
body and soul. In his own mind Achilles now felt equal
in all ways to Ἄρης : and the artist's armour beamed on him
like burning fire, or as the sun as it rises at dawn.

Hector saw the face of Achilles closing in and getting
sharper; and his body, all his limbs, reduced to trembling—
whether from fear, or from eagerness to fight, he did not wait
to learn, for he broke out in a run, leaving the city-gates
behind him; and this suggested to him monumental fear.

And son of Peleus Achilles, confident in his speed,
pursued the son of Priam close behind. So the two followed
the line of the city wall as it stretched into the distance;
and just as at the summit of mountains the quick-moving hawk
swoops down on the tender dove, and follows its darting prey
on an erratic life-saving path through the air, sending out
shrill cries as it keeps its prey close at hand, and its heart commands

it to catch the whirling dove : just so did Achilles rush at
Hector with lethal concentration as Hector ran as fast
as his legs could possibly take him; and for now he outran
his pursuer, for the edge was his : he was running for his life.
And the people of the city were peering down from above,
Trojans crowded on the battlements of Troy, watching the chase.

Achilles had Hector clear in his sights and could have let fly,
but he had a different death in mind for illustrious Hector.

So one ran after the other round the lofty city of Troy,
round the circumambient wall, past the Trojans looking down
with hope in their hearts for δῖος Hector to win victory.
One, then the other, sped past the Trojans' lookout-spot,
then past the fig-tree waving wild in the wind,
stepping on and off a wagon-track as Hector meant to fake
out Achilles, like the dove at the mountain summit racing
on its whirling airy way. The two of them ran past the pair
of springs pouring down into the whirling Scamander. One flows
with heated water through a showering spray in the air
sent up by its violently agitated waters, like smoke
rising from fire. The other flows cold as hail or chill
snow, even in the heat of summer, and ice floes float on it.
Just there, close by the springs, were the washing-pits, deep-dug, well-made,
and lined in stone, where the good wives and daughters of the Trojans
had once come to wash their linens, in the peaceful time before
the sons of the Achaeans came. But now the evil was here,
now the two men ran, one in flight, one in pursuit, round the wall
of the city. The man in front was swift of foot, but the man
behind was faster, stronger; yet for now Hector kept the edge,
for their foot-race was for no glittering prize, but to save his life.

Just as in foot-races, or competitions with thoroughbreds,
 the course is marked with spikes to serve as turning-points
 (and the prize-winner might win an animal for sacrifice,
 or a cauldron, or a woman, at a competition honouring
 a fallen warrior or another great champion), so here
 these two raging warriors ran around the mighty city
 of Priam three times without losing their breath, or their quick feet
 tiring; and all the gods in heaven watched. Then Zeus Father
 spoke out, saying :

“ὦ πόποι ! This much-beloved man I see is being chased
 around the wall of the city. Indeed, I feel a sadness
 for Hector, who has been very kind to us, burning many
 thigh-parts of oxen on the peaks of Ida. Up there he put
 down slabs of marble as altars to the gods. But Achilles
 chases him, and Achilles catches whatever he chases.

So, come now! my gods, meditate and consider
 whether Hector emerges safe through this trial,
 or if son of Peleus Achilles kills him here and now.”

Then bright-eyed Athena gave answer, saying :

“O Father, who moves all the clouds, and sends the lightning, what words
 are these you speak? An earth-born, destined long ago to die here,
 would be rescued from his miserable death, and you would change
 Fate? It will be as you say; but surely not all the gods approve.”

And Zeus answered :

“Peace, my beloved child, Τριτο-γένεια.

My words just now were not entirely decided.

I am happy to show kindness to you. It shall be
as you like. So press on with your purpose.”

Thus spoke Zeus. So Athena Defender rose up eagerly
and left the space of the gods. Down from Olympus
she rushed to Troy.

There, down at the foundation of the high walls, δῖος Hector
outran quick-moving Achilles, who pursued him with single-
minded purpose. Hector sprinted down the wagon-track, while
Achilles blazed a shorter but rougher way through the bushes
nearer the foot of the wall : just as a hound rouses a deer
in its lair, and pursues him through bends and hollows of a high
mountain, and the deer, cowering in fear in a thicket, gets
away for a time, but then it steps out, and the hound tracks it
down : just so, if Hector tried cutting inside to reach the gates,
δῖος Achilles would be there to cut him off. For Hector
there would be no escape. However, he attempted the gates,
and his people threw down from above all sorts onto the head
of Achilles, who sped up, and blocked Hector’s way to the city;
so straightaway Hector turned back onto the plain. Achilles,
meanwhile, held by the walls, furious that Hector was still
out of his hands. As if in a dream he was unable to
hit the mark, but he kept chasing what he could not overtake :
nor yet could the other escape : so the two were locked
in the chase, as one finds oneself inside a dream.

How had Hector outrun the goddesses of death, if not for
Apollo Foreseer, who came near (though this would be the last

time) and infused his nimble limbs with strength and speed?

And the warriors of the Achaean army raised their spears,
yet no man let fly; for each watched, and waited for Achilles
to act as he would against Hector, as if all was meant to be.

When they came for the fourth time to the springs,
Father raised the golden balance-scales,
and set thereon two fates of long-sorrowed
death, one for Achilles, one for Hector.

He weighed the two black fates on the scales,
and down sank Hector's plate, with its heavy
day of death upon it; and so a place
in Hades now awaited his coming.

And Φοῖβος Apollo left him. Then to
δῖος Achilles Athena Bright-Eyes
appeared. Coming near, she spoke out to him :

"Brilliant Achilles, your victory is coming. You'll bring great
glory to the Achaeans at the ships : Hector will lie dead.
He cannot escape you, not even if Apollo on his knees
begs Zeus Father for this to be! All shall be as has been said.

So you may as well stop running. Stand and take a breath.
I myself will go and bring that man to fight with you up close.
He, too, cannot outrun his allotted years, so he must stop.
In his greatest time he must fall. Nothing he does will prevent that."

Thus spoke Athena. So Achilles stopped, and rejoiced at heart.
He planted his ashwood spear in the ground and leaned upon it,
and took a welcome breath; then waited for what was coming next.

Athena, meantime, appeared before Hector in shape and voice of Deïphobus, his brother, whose killing arm was injured in the fighting. Standing together back by the Scaean gate, the goddess came up close to Hector, and spoke, saying :

“Good brother, quick-moving Achilles sends you round and round Priam’s city! So come now! Let us take our stand together here, and wait for him to come to us, the wondrous Achilles.”

And Hector of the glinting helmet answered him, saying :

“Deïphobus, of all the brothers and sisters that Priam and Hecuba gave us, I have always honoured you above all the others. And now here you are beside me, having come from the safety of the city to stand with me, in courage and love, while all the others remain inside. I honour you, brother, and friend, and fellow warrior.”

And bright-eyed goddess Athena replied to this :

“Good brother, in truth our whole family—our father, mother, and all our friends and warriors around us—begged me to stay inside the city. Every last one of them trembles at the name of Achilles. But my heart ached inside at the thought of you. So now it shall be you and I together against crazy Achilles. Let us charge at him at the same time, together, but from different directions, and see if he can fight in two minds at once. We will work at the spear as we have never worked at anything, and then we’ll know what’s what. Either Achilles kills us both, and carries off our bloody armour to his ships,

or we kill him.”

Thus, with such a trickery of words did Athena lead him on,
δῖος Hector, commander of the Trojans, and their last hope.

Then Achilles came before Hector, and they stood face to face.
Both shining warriors held their weapons lowered at their sides.

And Hector was first to speak, saying :

“I shall run from you no more, son of Peleus. Three times now
we’ve circled the great city of Priam, and for what? Because
I do not wish to face you? I know now I have no choice here.
I must face you. Either you’ll have my blood or I’ll have yours.
So come now! Let the gods be witness to a pact between us :
I will do you no indignity, I will treat you in no
shameful way, if Zeus grants me the endurance to outlast you,
and take your life. Once I have stripped your corpse of your wondrous
arms and armour, I will give your body back to the Achaeans.
And you do likewise.”

And δῖος Achilles, glaring at him from under dark brows,
answered him, saying :

“Hector, you speak of compacts, covenants, agreements, your word :
it’s insufferable to hear! There’s no such faith out in the world!
Do lions and men enter into covenants? Or wolves and lambs
into harmonious agreements? One thinks only to kill
the other—and that will never change. You would have us as friends?
There will be no ‘pacts’ between us, other than that one will live
and one will die. I say that you will lie bloody as Ἄρης

before me. So stop with such thought. Devote all your excellence to strength, and to keeping me back, because all of your skill in the spear, and all your long experience as a warrior, shall serve as no help to you now. I am here to take your life. You will repay everything terrible you've done, all at once : with your one life you'll pay for all the men you killed with your spear."

So each man, lethal bronze in hand, backed away from the other, then, quicker than thought, Achilles drew his spear back and let fly; but δῖος Hector, his eyes fixed on the enemy throughout, watched its flight, foresaw its fall, and made a movement, and felt the spear fly past. He heard it stick in the dirt behind him; but what Hector did not hear was that goddess Athena snatched it up hastily, here and gone as quick as lightning. Now the spear could be returned to Achilles μέγ' ἄθυμος .

Then Hector spoke to the excellent son of Peleus :

"You missed. Perhaps the gods don't favour you as you think they do. You don't think I knew that all your words were meant to distract me, so you might get around my strength? It didn't work. You did not make me forget myself, or my strength. Do you wish I were still running from you? Your spear shall not enter the back of a runaway. If you still had your weapon, you might have run it through my heart as I charge at you now, if a god had granted you that chance. Now it's your turn to avoid my bronze—though I'd rather you be carried off dead, with it sticking out your flesh. War then would be gentler for the Trojans, since you, sir, are the worst evil here."

So saying, Hector drew back his spear and let fly, his one chance for victory. And the spear-point clanged horrifically against

the shield of Achilles, and was a perfect shot to the heart.

But the spear bounced off the god-artist's shield and dropped to the earth.

So Achilles kicked it away, cracked and dulled and useless now.

Thus Hector ground his teeth in furious anger that his spear-point had flown to no good purpose from his grip. So he stood empty-handed, confounded, with no second spear to throw. Now, while he and Achilles appraised each other from across a distance, Hector shouted out for his brother Deïphobus to hear, calling for a second long spear for his hand : but his brother was gone. And perhaps he had never been there with Hector at all. All this Hector came to understand very quickly in his heart, and he saw Achilles raise his ancient shining spear in his killing hand, and Hector thought to himself :

"Goddamn gods! They've led me to my death! I thought I saw and spoke to my own brother—but guess what, he's inside the walls! It was Athena who swindled me. What have I done to her to earn that? Now I stand here with death in front of me, and no move to make. Zeus, and son Apollo, he who works his bad news from afar—in earlier times they seemed happy to help me. *All that time, though, they knew it was coming to this!* What's left for me is all there is. But I'm not going down without a struggle. Taking me won't be easy. I'm not going down shamefully; and men ever after will hear of the tale of Hector's good death!"

Thus Hector, who drew his sharp sword from his hip, a heavy sword and murderous; and he gathered himself for a leap forward, as a strong-soaring eagle enters a mass of gloomy clouds high over the plain, preparing to swoop down for a gentle lamb or trembling hare. So Hector rushed Achilles, his sharp

sword raised high. And Achilles, heart full of wild rage, didn't wait for Hector, but charged him, raising up his shield between them, and above it rose up the four horns of his helmet; and bright to blinding was the golden plume of thickly-bundled horsehair set there shuddering at the helmet's crest by god Hephaestus.

And as a star rises in the dead of night, the most beautiful one of all, the evening star, so rose the gleaming sharpened spear-point in Achilles' grip, as his eyes took in Hector all at once, searching out the one perfect place to stick in the slaughterous point. He saw bronze armour all over Hector's flesh, including the godly armour stripped from Patroclus (the shoulder-pieces, the leg-guards) when he murdered him, but Achilles also saw a minute gap where the collar-bones met the neck and shoulders : his wind-pipe was exposed. So Achilles made to throw his spear, and Hector lashed out with his sword : but the spear slid backward out from the grip of Achilles, who sidestepped Hector's falling sword-blade, and drew out his dagger and pushed it into Hector's wind-pipe. Both knew then that destruction was fast upon him.

So the two men stood eye to eye, and Achilles exulted :

“ δῖος Hector, you spoiled Patroclus, and then you felt safe. You didn't think much about me. Imbecile! I was alive, and at the ships. But now I am here, and you are dead. Let the dogs and birds do you no indignity, and treat you in no shameful way, having entered into an agreement together, to treat you kindly.”

And Achilles stepped back, taking his dagger with him. It slipped out of Hector, and the red blood spilled; then he fell to his knees,

and sideways into the dust.

And as the blood gushed, Hector had a minute or so to speak;
so he said, in a whisper :

“Achilles, I beg you—I beg all the gods—I beg you on
your life, and on your heart, and on your dear parents, do not let
the dogs have me by your ships. Take all the gold and bronze and all
the gifts my father and good mother shall give you, if only
you leave me for my home to take me back, so that the Trojan
men and women may burn my body, and honour me in death.”

And δῖος Achilles, glaring at him from under dark brows,
answered him, saying :

“Beg all you like, dead man, by gods or parents or whatever.
You’re lucky this rage of mine, and the will I have to follow it,
aren’t commanding me to dice you up, severed tongue first,
and eat you raw. In answer to what you did to me, the dogs
shall have your head, and that’s that. No one is going to stop them.
Weigh out riches ten times you imagine, twenty times, promise
even more : all that doesn’t matter one bit. There’s no burning
of your body, there’s no honouring you in death. There’s only
dogs and birds sharing every last piece of you among themselves.”

And as he died, joining the departed dead below, δῖος
Hector left Achilles with these last words to think on :

“Nothing good awaits you, friend. Your heart is dead. Hear me or not,
it’s no care of mine. You *will* find your death here. My family,
and all the gods you mock, shall kill you, glorious Achilles—”

And then Hector was dead. His spirit flitted from his body and went down to Hades. All his beauty and courage and youth were gone. But Achilles still answered him :

“Die! My fate is my own. When the gods will it to come, it comes.”

So he said, and sheathed his dagger. Then he set to strip the corpse of its armour, starting with the shoulder-pieces, as the sons of the Achaeans came up round him and the bloody body. They looked upon Hector, his wondrous face, his fine noble stature, but not one drew near without dealing him injury, wounding his slackened body, either with spear, sword, or swift kick.

Thus one man would turn to the next and say :

“Not so bright now, this Hector, the one who came to burn our ships! Now he’s weaker than air, and so much easier to fuck with.”

Thus one would say. Then, coming close, he’d strike the bloody body.

Then, when δῖος Achilles had stripped the corpse of its armour, he stood before all the Achaeans and spoke as a leader, saying :

“Hear me, friends! Heaven has allowed us to kill this man. So here he is, just as heaven allows. He worked worse evil than all the others of his army put together. Now we must work, and seek out the Trojans’ attitude of this composition. Come now, men! Enough with the body! Leave the body to me. Make reconnaissance in force around the city and find out

what's what. Is it time for them now to think of reparations, or do they prepare to attack us? Their glorious Hector, however, is no more. He shall bring to them no protection."

Thus spoke Achilles. He watched his men rush off along the foot of the walls of Troy with their spears raised. Achilles, meanwhile, contemplating Hector, thought to himself :

"So long as I am alive I will not forget the worthy dead. Patroclus lies unburied by the ships, waiting for his due rites. Let it be for now. For me, he will never be buried."

Then Achilles announced, for all his friends to hear him, saying :

"One day this will be a healing song of heroes in victory! Let us return now to our ships, you sons of the Achaeans, having won everlasting fame, having killed δῖος Hector, whom the Trojans honoured as a god. And we will be taking the body with us."

So the Trojans looked down on Achilles from their lofty walls, from the battlements, where news of the death of δῖος Hector swept like wildfire off into the city, where its army stood cowering.

And the Achaeans also watched Achilles, puzzled, as he set to work on δῖος Hector, perpetrating a shameful deed in plain sight of everyone in the city and on the plain.

Achilles took hold of the dead body's feet, one at a time, and pierced each ankle, tearing through muscle and tendon and bone; then through each bloody hole he slipped a well-twisted leather rope.

He took the ropes and bound them securely to his chariot.
The head of the corpse he let lie as it was, to drag along
the ground.

Achilles, then, conspicuous to all in heaven and earth
in his glorious god-artist's armour gleaming in sunlight,
stepped up into the chariot-box; and piled at his feet
was Hector's bloody armour. Then he cracked the whip
and the horses flew forward, the pair of them exhilarated.

And the racing wheels stirred up dust-whirls, within which
one might have seen Hector's head dragging on the earth;
but the dark hair flowing over his face obscured the damage
to his once beautiful form, and the dust whirled round him
as Achilles butchered the body, a reality granted to him by Zeus :
to humiliate Hector with the soil of his homeland.

And so it was that Trojan Hector's face ran along the dirt
of Troy. His mother tore off her white veil, and tore out her hair,
and her shrieks were heard through the entirety of the city.

His father, too, wailed in lamentation. So down through Troy
the people wailed, the women for Hecuba, the men for Priam.
The city might have been ablaze with fire, for all the sounds
of horror rising shrilly into the air. And the people
could scarcely hold back the old man, unstrung by grief, from rushing
out through the city gates to get to δῖος Achilles. Writhing
in the grip of his friends, he toppled to the ground, and tossed dust
over his head, and tore at his garments, and spoke to each man
by name, demanding :

“Let me go, my friends! If you care for me, allow me to go
 down from the city to the ships of the Argives! I will beg
 this invidious man to recognize the monstrosity
 of his evil acts! Perhaps he might feel shame beside his friends,
 and pity a father in his old age? He, too, has an old
 father, Peleus, who raised his son to be a misery
 for us. The man has put an unbearable grief in my heart,
 having slaughtered too many of my sons in their blessed youth.
 Now this one—Hector! This one death shall pull me with my grey hairs
 down to the grave. Ah, my arms cry out to hold him in his death!
 Then we would have cried out all our tears, both his miserable
 mother, and me.”

So spoke the father, weeping; and all the people lamented.

Hecuba, then, luckless woman, luckless queen, led the weeping
 and the lamentation of the hapless Trojan women :

“Oh, horror, horror! My child! Why am I to live, when you
 are gone in death? What worth is life, when all of value is lost?
 You were my treasure night and day. Hector, unhappy Hector,
 you are gone! I shall never again hear your voice, or see your
 eyes in mine. You brought hope to all the people in the city,
 who honoured you as a god. They admired the nobility
 unmistakable in your face. Ah, our city, brought so low!
 Whenever has the light of the sun looked so barren in our eyes?
 The old in years see beyond what should be seen by the living.
 Because I see the future clear before me now : of all women,
 I am to be the unluckiest. Ah, no! Where can I turn?
 In which direction is Hector not dead at the end of it?

Nowhere. There is no escaping what's always ahead of us.
 I reach for your hands, my friends. I faint; take hold of an old woman.
 Once we lived in glory, but death and fate have come to find us."

Wife of Hector Andromache, meantime, was plying the needle
 at their home, with their child Astyanax crawling around
 her feet, laughing in joy, while she wove in many-coloured
 ornaments, carefully-worked flowers, into an embroidered
 robe, its fabric long and resplendent, while sitting beside
 her loom. The boy's laughter kept the horrid cries of the city
 out of her ears. This was the last moment of peace in the life
 of Andromache, for no messenger had yet brought her news
 of Hector lying at the gates. So, as on any other day,
 she asked of her handmaidens to set the bath on the fire,
 and warm it for when her husband returned from the battlefield.

Unhappy Andromache! Athena Bright-Eyes has destroyed
 your husband, using the mind of Achilles as her weapon!

She would now come to know this. Now Andromache heard the shrieks
 and cries breaking out through the city, and the room whirled
 around her. She dropped her work to the floor, and Astyanax laughed.

Then she rose to her feet, and called out to her handmaids, saying :

"We must go, two of you, and see what has happened.
 What I just heard was a crying out of the queen.
 My heart pounds; I feel it in my throat. And my legs
 are weak. I know something terrible has happened
 to the children of Hecuba. I fear to hear
 what I think inside : that the crazy Achilles

has driven Hector out onto the plain, away
from the city, keeping my husband from the gates.
Please may I be wrong! But my husband's glorious
courage obliges him to leap into fatal places!
In my mind his courage is terrible to me.
He knows no fear, and ever charges to the front
in his fury, stepping back from no man in his way."

Thus spoke Andromache, her heart pounding inside her. Frantic
as a madwoman she rushed through the corridors of columns
with her two handmaidens, and left the happy Astyanax
behind, playing at home.

When she came to the high tower, she rushed through the gathering
of men, and up the stairs; and there, on top of the wall, she looked
out, and saw him dragged in front of the city. Quick-galloping
horses were dragging him heartlessly toward the Achaean ships.

Andromache swooned in a faint, and night came over her eyes,
and she sank to her knees, and sighed out her spirit.

She raised a hand and pulled away the attire on her head,
head-band, kerchief, and the veil, too, a gift of heavenly
Aphrodite on the day shining Hector led her from home
as his bride, hand in hand, after he had flattered her father
Eëtion with dazzling wedding-gifts beyond counting.

Around her came the sisters of her husbands, and her brothers'
wives, and they lifted her up. They thought she might die from her pain.

When Andromache came to, she began to speak through her tears

beside the tragic women of Troy :

“No, no, no, no, no! Hector, dearest, why were we born for this?
 Why would we be given lovely lives, but miserable ends?
 You were raised in lofty Troy, and I in the woods of Thebe,
 under Placus Mount—why were we fated to meet and suffer?
 Why would Destiny doom us from the start? What is the purpose
 of being born for this? Now you have gone down to abysmal
 Hades under the earth. I am left with immeasurable
 sorrow, a widow in your halls, with our baby defenceless
 against the hateful Achaeans. What profit is there in this
 for anyone? Once you fed the child on your lap (only
 fresh and healthy food, you always said). And when the child slept,
 wherever it might be, you’d take him in your arms and lower
 him in his soft bed, to rest all the better. And the boy’s heart
 was happy. Why give us all that happiness, only to take it
 all away? Now the Argives will take the rest of it from us,
 for you alone prevented them from entering the city.
 Meanwhile they’ll make it as bad as it can be, denying
 you burial, so that in plain sight the worms will eat through you,
 and the dogs, too, will fill their bellies with your naked body.
 Let them disgrace themselves with our misfortune! All your garments
 in our halls, well-woven by the hands of women, fine and full
 of grace, I shall burn down to nothing! We can make fire, too!
 This fire shall be an inspiration to all Trojan men and women!”

Thus she spoke through her tears and the sighs of the Trojan women.

End of Book XXII

Book XXIII

And so warrior Achilles withdrew from the battlefield,
 his body dripping with the blood of his enemy. Behind
 him sounded the wails and deep moans rising from the city.
 And the army of the Achaeans straggled back into camp,
 each to his ship; except for the Myrmidons, whom Achilles
 commanded to remain as one; and he spoke to them, saying :

“Myrmidons, my warriors, do not yet release the horses
 from the yokes, but from our chariots let us howl our loss
 to heaven. We shall mourn Patroclus; for the last gift we give
 the dead is respect. Then when our every last tear has been dropped,
 we will undo the horses, and sit together at supper.”

And so warrior Achilles led the due and proper rites
 of lamentation, there by the waves of the sea, and as one
 spirit sounded the wails and deep moans of the Myrmidons.
 Three times they circled round the corpse with their long-maned horses
 and their eyes streaming tears. Drenched were the sands of the sea-shore
 with their tears; and their armour was damp; and they mourned their lost author
 of the untiring battle-cry, master of the bronze,
 who had once put terror in the hearts of his enemies.

And so warrior Achilles came down from his chariot.
 He led the loud-voiced lament from the centre of the circle;
 and he laid his man-killing hands on the heart of his friend.

And he said :

“Warrior, hear me. Patroclus, hear me down in Hades as I

complete everything I vowed with my enduring word to do.
Hector is gone. And now twelve noble sons await your pyre,
where their royal Trojan throats will feel the straight rage of my knife.”

And then he set to work on δῖος Hector, perpetrating
a shameful deed : he dropped his powerless body in the dust,
face-down, before the funeral-bier of good Patroclus,
and left him there. Thus Andromache’s horrible suspicion
came true : in sight of all, her husband’s corpse lay wasting away.

But Achilles was far from satiated with the invention
of perversities to punish every last person on the plain;
and was also perhaps answering the awful gods in heaven.
Principally, though, he was following the true heart inside him.

So his men, each of his Myrmidons, removed their fighting gear,
their arms and armour; and released their lively neighing horses
from the yoke, and sat down together by the ship of the son
of Aeacus, a vast quantity of warriors; and he gave
a funeral feast sufficient to satisfy each man’s heart.

He led bulls of the breed from uttermost Ethiopia,
of huge size and savage natures, whom men called the “flesh-eaters”;
and the many of them bellowed out their lives as the iron
blade opened their throats, alongside the bleating goats and the sheep,
who also went down to death as sacrifice for the living.
And they slaughtered many white-tusked wild boars, loaded with flesh,
which they stretched out to singe off over the flame of Hephaestus.
And they caught the gushing blood of the many victims in cups
so they might pour to the gods (whichever god cared to attend),
round the corpse of Patroclus, lying in repose.

Then master Achilles was escorted to Agamemnon
 by the leaders of the Achaeans, who had used all their wit
 to persuade him to come, for all the rage eating up his heart
 for his friend. And when they had come to King Agamemnon's tent,
 the leaders asked for a great cauldron to be set on the fire,
 and attempted to persuade Achilles to wash off the gore
 from his body, the bloody implicate of many sources.

But Achilles answered them :

"No. I say this by Zeus or by the name of whatever god
 is highest, I wash off nothing until I lay Patroclus
 on the fire, and have piled, stone by stone, his burial
 mound, with my head razed of all its hair. For me there will be no
 second occasion for such sorrow, not while I'm alive.

Now let us obey the necessity of food at a time
 we must loathe. But at sunrise, Agamemnon, send forth some men
 to bring the kindling. They shall do all that befits a soul
 down now among the shadows in that hateful place;
 and the fire will all the quicker remove him from our sight.
 Then the army can return itself to its other duties."

So spoke Achilles, and the men unhesitatingly obeyed.
 At once they prepared the meal, and each received his equal share.
 When content with food and drink, each man went to his hut to rest.

But the son of Peleus walked along the sands by the waves
 of the sea, the load-roaring seawater battling up the shore
 then withdrawing, in sprays and splashing; and seasoning with salt

the clear air of the open space; and then night came over all.

There, on the beach, Achilles lay in the sand, sending out sounds of lamentation—many sighs, much groaning—his voice husky with irrecoverable unease. He fell asleep then, as the waves came and went, on the parcel of beach allotted to the ships of the Myrmidons. For that brief moment the colossal cares in the heart of Achilles were assuaged. His powerful limbs, grown weary after their toil, were lost in sweet forgetfulness. He had executed his pursuit of Hector to the end, all the way from the ships to the foundation of lofty Troy.

There on the beach of many sands, Achilles felt a shadow fall over him. So he opened his eyes, and saw before him a shadow upright in the air, a shade in the shape of a man. It was Patroclus, his greatness of form and figure. He had come from the abysmal place beneath the earth. Now he stood over Achilles, and spoke to him, saying :

“You sleep, and forget me. Achilles, when I was here you cared, but as soon as I’m gone . . . ! Friend, bury me. Do it with all speed, for I wander now through Hades. There is a river, and I cannot cross it and join with all the shadows, all the spirits done with their toil and now penned in there behind the wide gates; but I wander now through Hades as a shadow on my own. Give me your hand—so I may lament you; for once I’ve gone down to ash in the fire, I will never return to you again. But we had a good time, off on our own, away from our friends. Now, though, I occupy a terrible place. It was the fate given to me at my birth. Just as you, too, so like a god, will fall here by the wall of these vile Trojans. Hear me now.

Achilles, remember this. Our bones shall not be set apart,
 but endure together, like when we lived in your house when I
 was a young boy, and Menoetius brought me from Opoeis
 to live in your land and stay away from my own, after I
 became a little too upset over a dice game and killed
 a man, Amphidamus' son. (But I hadn't meant to go
 that far, even in my rage over some small disagreement.)
 Kind Peleus took me in, and addressed me as your brother.
 So let one urn hold both our ashes. Why not that two-handled
 gold vase your good mother gave you?"

And Achilles answered :

"My only beloved! Why would you come here and tell me that?
 I've thought it. You need not attempt to persuade me. Unless, for
 a little while, you try. Shall we pass some time pleasurably,
 in embraces, and sighs?"

So saying, he reached his hands out for his beloved, but took
 hold of nothing; his arms went through shadowy watery spray.
 And the spirit of Patroclus withdrew back under the earth,
 leaving along the way unearthly sounds, high and clear like bird-
 song, yet sharp with screechy vibrations as from bats : a strange sound.

And Achilles came up out of the burial-place of sleep,
 and sprang to his feet, as if in combat. He saw the open
 water and smacked his hands together, then said words of mournful
 humour :

"Ah! Death is not the end! Soul and shape remain—only his mind
 wasn't all there. Good Patroclus was at my side all night long,

looking like his wondrous self, blessed by God, and tears came down my face, yet all he did was talk too much, and do too little.”

So said Achilles; and he stirred all the Myrmidons to think on the fallen. And as the tears flowed round the miserable corpse, Dawn opened up her rosy fingers over the plain.

Then Agamemnon sent men out from all round the army with mules and axes into the woodlands to cut firewood; and Meriones was tasked as overseer, the attendant of mighty Idomeneus. So the cutters took their axes and their well-plaited ropes, and guided the mules ahead of them; and uphill, downhill, sidewise, and sidelong they travelled, until they came to Ida, sacred mountain of many springs. At once they set to the oak trees with urgent swings of the axe, and heaven echoed with the crash of many ancient trees, loud as the sound of Zeus’ bolts. The Achaeans then split the wood into logs, and tied it all to the mules, whose hoofs scuffed the earth as they stepped through the thick-grown brushwood and undergrowth and twigs and bushes on their eager way back to the camp. So the men returned with the firewood, as directed by Meriones, attendant of Idomeneus.

The cutters set the firewood down on the sands by the sea, striking the earth, one by one, where Achilles, still very much alive, was preparing a burial place for Patroclus and himself. When all the deep forest wood had touched sacred earth a second time, all the men sat down on the sand together, and together looked out at the waves, were silent, and waited.

Next, Achilles ordered his war-loving Myrmidons to put

on their bronze, and prepare the chariots. So the warriors rose and dressed themselves in armour. Then, two horses each were yoked to the chariots. So, rolling forward, each chariot-box held a warrior and a driver. Behind this, innumerable foot-forces followed thick as cloud, and, atop this, lifted high in the hands of the men, was the body of good Patroclus. And he looked to be wearing a garment made wholly of hair, as each man had cut handfuls of his hair and flung it onto the body. At the back of the procession, away from the rest, and keeping his head bowed, δῖος Achilles walked, troubled in soul, for he was leading his excellent friend into Hades.

So when they came to the spot designated by Achilles, they set down the dead, and stacked high the great weight of firewood.

Then when the funeral pyre was built, Achilles went off and stood alone on the sand, and looked out on the wine-dark sea.

He cut away the long flowing lock of golden hair, growing since childhood, and kept in honour of Spercheüs, river of his homeland : he cut it away, and that was that. Never would it be restored; it was lost, taken away forever.

He held the sacred lock in his hand. And troubled in spirit almost to anger, he spoke to his heart :

“Spercheüs, how idly was all this grown for you! There will be no return to my homeland to put this by your waters, as my old father prayed to you, speaking of sacrificing a hecatomb of oxen, and fifty rams of perfect form, in honour of you when I return to my glorious home

and your running waters. So the old man said at your sacred spot and altar—but the prayer meant nothing. I will never see you again. So this in my hand can never be set down on your altar for you. Thus I give it now to Patroclus, for luck and good fortune—whatever that means down in Hades.”

So he spoke, and he put his lifelong lock of hair in the hand of his only friend, for luck and good fortune; and around him his Myrmidons, and all the army, yearned for tears and lament.

At sundown Achilles went to Agamemnon, and he said :

“Son of Atreus, you’re the only man the army will listen to. Their lamenting need not stop, if that is what the army wants; but they do need to eat. Please give the word for the Achaeans to return to their tents and prepare their suppers. Those closest to the dead will stay by his side, and continue with the rite.”

At this, then, Agamemnon, commander of the Achaean forces, ordered all men to carry on with things at the ships.

Only persons attending to the dead remained on the spot, the closest friends and family. The pyre was a hundred feet long from end to end, and the mourners completed it, each with offerings of kindling, with hearts full of sorrows. And at the top of the pyre lay the body of Patroclus.

Down in front of the pyre, many fat sheep and horned cattle were slaughtered and flayed, then opened up. And Achilles μέγα-θυμός gathered all the glistening animal fat and wrapped the dead in it from head to foot; then left the bodies

heaped there, flayed and gutted, round the bier of the dead.

And he set down amphorae of honey and oil, leaving them reclined against the bier. And four powerful horses were put into the pyre, sounding out furiously all the while.

Royal Patroclus had allowed nine dogs to play by his feet at table. Achilles picked up two of these and slit their throats, and tossed them onto the pyre. Then he killed the twelve Trojan sons, one by one, slowly, each before the eyes of the others, using his clean-edged sword. Now all the grim work, devised in his heart, was complete and ready, and he set the flame to it, and left the hard rage of the fire to run wild, to feed on all it willed.

But the fire wouldn't start. Only very slowly did the flame creep along the kindling of the colossal structure. So δῖος Achilles required another idea. He stood away from the pyre, and appealed to Boreas and Zephyrus to come, promising to gather more victims, sacrifices for their pleasure. He poured the wine from a golden cup, and prayed that the flames might swiftly rise up and devour the pyre, that they might spark the kindling from Ida, and let it burn bright.

Wind-walking goddess Iris heard this prayer. She delivered the mortal words to the two winds, the North Wind and the West Wind, those who shape the path of ships on the sea, and life on land, too, when they wish. The two were mixing in the west, and a rainbow appeared there in its many bright colours, and they saw, and heard :

"I come from the streams of Oceanus, birthplace of immortals.

Thetis' Achilles appeals to Boreas and Zephyrus to rouse themselves, and promises many beautiful offerings, if only brightly burns the pyre of his friend Patroclus,

he for whom the air fills wholly with sighs from the Achaeans.”

So spoke Iris, who then faded away. So the two winds rose wondrously strong, pushing clouds wildly along; and waves rushed in great swells up the beach. So the winds swept over the pyre, sending flames rushing up the sacred pieces of high Ida. And the fire burned wondrously strong all night long, as one blast of breath came on continuously to keep the flames fierce. So all night long Achilles, with amphorae of wine in hand, prayed. And in his way he said his goodbye to good Patroclus.

And as the mighty earth rolled on along its familiar ways, then the morning-star revealed her face to the sombre planet, the ally of Dawn, who comes and lifts her garment of light up from behind the broad salt sea. Now she came, and let her light sink gently down to earth. At this quiet hour, the fire ceased, its fury stilled, and the flames died. The two winds, mighty Boreas and Zephyrus, withdrew homeward over the Thracian sea, whose blue waters swelled up and cried out in sighs as they went by.

Then Achilles son of Peleus—his legs gave way under him, and he sank to the sands by the side of the waves of the sea. He had grown weary, but he had finished his toil for now, and sweet sleep rushed up over him and immersed him in darkness.

So a new day began. And the retinue round commander of army forces Agamemnon made a great noise of stamping their feet in the sand; and their racket of consolidated voices and footsteps awakened Achilles, who sprang to his feet, as if in combat.

Then he spoke to them, saying :

“Son of Atreus, all you leaders of the Achaeans, all you
best men, now we pour red wine over what is left of the fire,
to extinguish the remains of what once burned massive;
Then we gather up the bones of good Patroclus.
You must choose them well from out of the many bones
there, but they will be easy to recognize, for Patroclus
lay in the centre, while the rest burned to nothing, horses
and men, all around him, indiscriminate in the pyre.
For now, Patroclus’ bones shall be laid in a golden bowl,
and protected by the sacrificial fat of a victim,
till we return to the tents. There I shall put the bones into
a golden urn that Patroclus chose, and that my mother
gave me as a goodbye gift, when I left to sail for Troy.
There his bones shall wait until I meet him down in Hades.
Build what memorial is suitable in stature for now.
But when I’m gone, raise it high behind me, before you sail home.”

Thus spoke son of Peleus Achilles. And they obeyed him.

So they poured the wine over the remnants of flame.
Now the bones were deep in the midst of the sunken kindling,
and the men were required to amble in, and root through,
to gather up the white bones of their friend, once so kind-hearted,
and gentle, and amiable. So tears dropped in the rising smoke
as they worked, and gathered together the bones in the golden
bowl, and protected them with moisture gathered from a victim;
then, for now, in a tent that Achilles had no care to hear of,
the golden bowl was set down, and covered with fine white linen.

Then they laid the foundation of the Cenotaphium.

They marked a circle with upright stones, broad enough to contain what was left of the pyre; then piled the earth high inside the circle. When the dirt and the stones reached a suitable height, the men turned away to return to their tents by the ships.

But Achilles stopped them and ordered them to sit where they were.

Then he requested of his attendants to return from his tent with many precious prizes, including cauldrons and horses and shapely women, for the funeral games to Patroclus.

First, for the fastest charioteers he had inviting prizes set out before the assembled Argive army. A woman awaited the winner to lead away as his own : shapely, and well-skilled in excellent hand-work; also a three-legged bronze cauldron with elaborate handles and a capacity of twenty-two measures. Second place won you a lovely horse, a six year old, and pregnant. Third place was a silver basin, with which one purified the hands with water before a meal. Put on show for fourth place were two heavy-weighted gold pieces. Fifth place was a two-handled cup, a sparkling-new kantharos decorated with picture-work, richly-detailed imagery of myth to be grasped by him who holds the cup during wineful Dionysian rites of fertility. But the drivers present were occupied with the pleasant idea of first prize.

Then Achilles said to the Argives :

“Agamemnon, all you powerful Achaeans, all these things await the charioteers. I, for one, would have enjoyed taking first, and leading it back to my tent. But I must honour Patroclus in my way, and shall stand among the spectators.

As it is, look at my horses. The Immortals, that outrun
the best of all others by far, given to me by my father.

We see that they mourn their fallen driver : they bow their heads down
to the earth, and their manes trail in the dust. They miss their kind
driver. So good a man he was, he would pour soothing oils
into their manes after washing their bodies in clear water.
So now the two horses stand there mourning their fallen hero.

Now let the army prepare for competition. Let us see
who of us has confidence enough in his horses and car.”

So spoke Achilles, destroyer of men and cities, and the army
sprang into action, and all charioteers of powerful
confidence began to join together at the appointed spot.

Rising first was Eumelus, king of men, much-loved son of great
parents, Admetus and Alcestis, whose love for each other
as husband and wife is immortalized in song and story
down through the ages even unto the present day. Their son,
favoured of Athena Victory, was well-skilled in the art
of driving war-chariots; and most thought him hard to beat.

Rising after him was the son of Tydeus, mighty Diomedes,
whose bold feats in battle were past counting; the horses, in fact,
he now led to his chariot were not his but Aeneas’;
he stole them when the Trojan was snatched away by Apollo.
The man’s life was saved, but Diomedes now owned his horses;
a trade some might call fair, or not, according to one’s standards.

Third to rise was son of Atreus Menelaus, beloved

of Zeus. He led under the yoke two fulmineous horses,
wondrously lightning-swift. The first was faithful Aëthe,
his brother Agamemnon's horse. The second was his own horse,
frisky Podargus. Now Anchises gifted this wondrous horse
to leader Agamemnon, so that his beloved son might
not follow the Argives to the windy plain of Scamander
but remain safe and sound at home, and enjoy his pleasures there,
for Zeus had blessed him with an abundance of earthly wealth,
and his estate was spacious even for Sicyon, near Corinth.
So Podargus was yoked, then leapt about full eager to race.

And the fourth driver to take his chances was Antilochus,
the excellent son of Nestor, the army's foremost minister,
and celebrated far and wide among men for his wisdom.
The fast-galloping horses, now yoked to his son's chariot,
had been bred at sandy Pylos (which brings back fond memories
of Odysseus and Telemachus and *The Odyssey*.)

And so the illustrious Nestor came to stand by his son,
and proceeded to speak words of surpassing utility,
for Nestor enjoyed to employ his mind in active thought,
and demonstrated this passion of his in elaborate speech :

"Antilochus," he began, "you're young, but Zeus and Poseidon
love you, and have instructed you in all of the many details
of horsemanship and chariot-fighting. So to give you words
of instruction here is unnecessary, for you well know
the importance of the turning-post, of how to wheel around it.
But your horses run slowly, so I think it's tough luck for you.
The other horses run much faster. However, the others
have no knowledge of what I know, experienced as I am.

So come now! Let us put our heads together and strategize.
 Hear my wise advice, and take it to heart, so that you won't lose
 out on any of the precious gifts. It goes without saying,
 but I'll say it anyway : Cleverness in a wood-cutter
 is much better than strength. Cleverness is what a helmsman
 uses to keep upright a swift ship wracked by winds and waves,
 as he holds his hands on the tiller. And so by cleverness
 can one charioteer beat another."

Then Nestor eyed his son to confirm he had his attention,
 then continued :

"Another driver, confident in his horses and car, simply
 moves this way and that, letting his horses run wildly
 round the race-course, and does not steer with a fine hand.
 But he who knows how to do these things well, although his horses
 are the slowest, keeps his eyes fixed always on the turning-post,
 and he wheels to it as close to it as he can, using the reins well,
 holding his horses to their speed, and all the while keeping
 a close eye on he who holds in front. Now I'll give you a word
 of advice in plain words so you're sure to understand me.
 Do you see there a dry white tree-stump, about as high as I am?
 Whether oak or pine, I have no idea; but it hasn't rotted
 away after many years of rainfall : that's how dry it is.
 It's set firm in the earth at the fork in the course,
 with one white stone to either side of it, there at the turn
 from forward to homestretch. (Yes, all the course around it
 looks smooth to my eye, a good ride for chariots, certainly.)
 I'll tell you another thing about that turning-post : I think
 it's a memorial for a man who died ages ago.
 Or maybe it's always only been a turning-post, chosen

for races by men long past. And now Achilles chooses it.
 Running hard toward the turning-post : this is what you must do
 with your chariot and horses. You lean with your chariot
 into the turn, your well-made box with its well-twisted wickerwork;
 but lean in to the turning-post just a tad with your left horse,
 but steer the right horse to the right, calling to it and spurring
 it on—then allow both horses free rein. Let the horse on the left
 draw close enough for the wheel-hub to scratch the stone,
 but try to avoid touching it even ever so little,
 or you'll overturn your chariot and injure your horses.
 The others would laugh at that, so don't let that happen to you.
 Ah, my beloved son! Use your mind, concentrate, stay on your
 guard, and watch for yourself; for if you handle the turning-post
 as I have counselled, you will pass the others on the race-course,
 and no man will be able to catch you or overtake you.
 Ha! Not even if he were driving δῖος Arion behind you!
 That was Adrastus' wondrous horse, faster than any
 man thought possible, for it came from a heavenly breed.
 Or the horses of Laomedon, which are raised well in Troy."

Thus spoke Nestor, son of Neleus, then sat down
 among the spectators, having given his son
 the sum and substance of his mind on the turning-post.

And fifth to rise was Meriones, who prepared his horses.

Each man then stepped up into his chariot. And Achilles,
 moving from driver to driver, held out to each a helmet,
 and all of the competitors tossed a pebble inside of it.
 Achilles then shook the helmet. The pebbles inside rattled,
 and rolling out first onto the earth was the mark of Nestor's son,

Antilochus. So he moved to position himself at the far left of the line. Second position fell by chance to noble Eumelus. Beside him came Menelaus, famed for the spear, but more famous for his wife. Meriones then received fourth position at the post. Last, then, on the outside, was the son of Tydeus Diomedes, best of all the charioteers by far.

So they stood in a row at the starting line, and Achilles indicated the turning-post far off on the flat race-course on the Scamander Plain. And as official he chose Phoenix, an old comrade of his father's in war, so that he might watch the race closely, and declare the truth of it impartially.

Each man's horses then heard the crack of the whip, and felt the sting, and heard the calls from their drivers (some words of mortals) : then quick as lightning all at once sprang forward, galloping swiftly over the plain, away from the black ships. And dust came up to their chests, lifting from the earth like a cloud or whirlwind; and their long manes stretched out sustainedly on the air-stream. Now the chariots bent close to the all-nourishing earth, now they bounced high into the air. And each man in his car felt his heart pounding inside his chest as each pressed for victory. And all their loud calling to their horses rose up out of the dust-cloud moving along the race-course on the plain.

So now the horses had hit full speed.

At the turning-post they came back round to face the ancient sea. So now the excellence of each was pushed to the limit down the homestretch, their quality showing ever clearer as they ran. And the quick-galloping horses of Eumelus were front runner down the straightaway, with the fine Trojan stallions driven by

Diomedes a neck behind; and Eumelus' horses
 heard the panting close upon them, then hot breath came over them
 and over Eumelus, as Diomedes came up a stride
 from overtaking them. Neck and neck they flew down the race-course.

Now mighty Diomedes might have sailed by Eumelus,
 or at least kept aside, chasing a still-uncertain outcome,
 had not Φοῖβος Apollo, decider of chance, compelled iron
 Diomedes to drop his whip! For the god, so it happened,
 had reared Eumelus' horses himself. Thus ended the son
 of Tydeus' bid to steal the race; an unlucky break.
 Diomedes ground his teeth; and his eyes burned with tears of rage,
 while he watched the other pull ahead of him, as his own
 horses ran on without goad to shift to a quicker pace.

But Athena goddess saw the cheat, Apollo's tricky move
 on mighty Diomedes, so rushed instantly to his side,
 the leader of men. She put the whip back in his hand and gave
 strength to the legs of his exceptionally galloping horses;
 and he pushed out ahead of his rivals in the race.

Then in anger she went to Eumelus and shattered his yoke.
 His horses ran wayward and contrary, and he fell off the pace,
 and his chariot pole scraped erratically along the track,
 and he found himself sprawled in the dirt, watching his chariot
 wheel away. All the skin had been torn away from his elbows
 and mouth and nose; and his forehead was concussed, and bleeding red;
 and his eyes swam with thick tears, and wrenching sobs stopped up his throat,
 and he experienced the phenomenon of speechlessness
 as he watched the others fly past him in the dust.

Diomedes, meanwhile, held position in front; and moved ever-farther away from the rest, bursting to a broad lead. For Athena sought to put him over the finish line first, and give him all the glory. But Menelaus, hard at it, pressed after him with small chance he would abandon the pursuit.

Antilochus then exhorted his father's horses, saying :

*"Get in there, babies, go to the limit. Fuck Diomedes—
Athena gives him strength for who knows why and would have him win.
But you got to get to Menelaus. If we don't leave him
in the dust you'll have me looking like an idiot. Come on,
babies! His horses are mares! You better hear me now, like it
or not : if you lose, Nestor is liable to have you killed.
It's second prize for me or the sharp bronze for you.
Come on then! Push yourself! Get up there! Don't worry about me.
We'll pass him. I'll think of something. An idea will come to me."*

So spoke Antilochus, and his horses, afraid before the harsh noise of their master, ran faster for a time. Antilochus, meanwhile, not about to give up, saw a detail ahead that might work for him. Quick-thinking Menelaus had taken his position in the middle of the narrow straightaway, hard beside a gully in the track cut out by winter rains. Thus the going up ahead on the inside was rough; and he should cut outside to be safe—but that would lose time, and Menelaus might pull out of reach : so Antilochus moved to the inside, and braved the hollow spot in the hard track. The surface condition was dangerous, and he was pushing out in front of Menelaus.

And the son of Atreus shouted :

“Watch it, you idiot! You’ll turn us both over!
Pull up and go outside or you’ll kill both of us!”

So shouted Menelaus, but Antilochus drove harder,
plying the whip, urging on his horses as if he’d heard
nothing. So now they ran nose to nose. Just so far
as the distance of a discus-throw, when a young man spins round
and hurls it, testing his strength, just so far they ran together,
and each heard the sound of the heavy breathing of the other.
Then the mares of Atreus’ son fell off the pace,
and Antilochus stretched the lead on him a length, galloping
and wheeling, for Menelaus had pulled up on his horses
to keep the animals from colliding, and overturning
the chariots, and flinging them into the dust
in their eagerness to gallop to victory.

And Menelaus shouted out :

“By all the gods, Antilochus, you’re a pestilence beyond
all others! Go on then! The Achaeans actually think you
have sense? I think not! And you’ll have nothing without my protest!”

Then Menelaus exhorted his horses, saying :

“Don’t fret, friends, just run flat out! Those horses
in front are no longer young! They’ll soon get tired!”

So spoke Menelaus, and his horses, afraid before the harsh
noise of their master, ran faster for a time, closing the gap

with the chariot in front of their fast-galloping hooves.

Now the spectators of the race, sitting in assembly,
looked toward the chariots and horses on the plain,
and the plain was obscured with rising dust.

And standing on his own, apart from the others, on a rise
commanding a wide view, stood Idomeneus, king of men.
He recognized the voice that had shouted out, though far away,
and saw a bay horse with a white spot, round on its forehead
like a full moon amid the whirling dust.

So Idomeneus went to the others and spoke, saying :

“Friends, Argives! Let me tell you what I see. It looks
to me as if Diomedes is out in front. I don’t know
what happened at the turning-post, but one chariot
is short of the backstretch. I look out but I cannot see it.
Maybe the driver lost control at the post, and wheeled off
from the track, and now lies thrown to earth beside his chariot,
wrecked, with his horses bolted who knows where.
I can hardly see anything in all that dust, but I think
Diomedes is out in front.”

And Ajax, son of Oïleus, replied quickly :

“Ah, Idomeneus’ big talk! I was waiting for it!
The fast-galloping horses fly with speed in a cloud of dust
over the plain too far away to see, yet he says he sees!
Note you’re far from the youngest Argive here, friend,
so your eyes can’t be sharpest—yet you speak loudest!

It will go better for everyone, all of us sharper ones,
if you speak quietly, please. I say the horses out in front
are Eumelus', and he's standing and steering in his box."

Then Idomeneus answered him angrily :

"Little Ajax, bad artist of insult, your every word ill-
judged, though spoken so confidently! You thoroughly
unpleasant person. Come on then! I'll bet you a bronze cauldron
the race is as I say it is. Shall we have Agamemnon as judge,
and decide which horses lead the race? Beware, though, the answer
will cost you."

Quickly Ajax stood before Idomeneus. Achilles,
then, was there, and spread the gap between them
before things turned ugly. Then he spoke out harshly to them both :

"No more trouble-making from either of you! Sit the hell down
and be quiet! You should be embarrassed, behaving like this.
I say sit down, and watch the horses. Be mild. They'll be here
soon enough. We'll find out, each one of us, who's off the bridle,
and who's out in front."

Thus spoke Achilles.

And so son of Tydeus Diomedes and his horses
sprinted down the home straight. Over and over his right arm came
down as he used the stick to drive his horses to full effort;
and his horses, feeling the stings sprinkling their bodies, pushed
flat out. And the spectators saw come out of the whirl of sand
Diomedes and his horses in the lead. And so powerful

were the horses, and so lightly did they gallop on the plain,
 that the heavy chariot, its sides ornate with gold and tin
 embellishments, barely left a track with its rolling wheels,
 as he streaked through the dust up in his box, barely skimming earth.

And so Diomedes pulled up in front of the spectators.
 He was covered head to foot in fine dust, and his horses gushed
 sweat onto the ground from their necks and chests. And Diomedes
 sprang up and out of his chariot, brightly shining in figure,
 and leaned the whip against the yoke; and that was that.
 Without delay faithful Sthenelus took the prizes for first,
 handed the woman and the two-handled bronze cauldron
 to his men to take away; then he set the winning horses
 free of the yoke.

The contest for second place, meantime, was fierce. Antilochus
 had passed Menelaus by, not by speed, but by cleverness;
 and so now son of Nestor Antilochus and his horses
 sprinted down the home straight, with the finish line in sight.
 Yet Menelaus pursued him from less than a chariot-
 length behind. So Atreus' horses, straining at the top end
 of their galloping speed, and pulling Menelaus behind
 them in his box between the wheels, shortened the length
 of the gap between the competitors from a discus throw
 to a hair, racing forward and almost touching the rear rim
 of the chariot in front, as the plain rushed under their hooves :
 just such a distance divided excellent Antilochus
 and Menelaus. So the chariots raced, gleaming in dust.
 And Menelaus' horses swept to the outside and raced
 up to Antilochus and began to overtake his horses,
 their noses up past their tails now; for Agamemnon's mare,

noble Aëthe of the beautiful mane, pushed herself now beyond her limit. And if the race-course had been just slightly longer in length, then the goodly pair would have passed him by and taken second, no doubt about it. But Meriones, in battle famously bloodthirsty, had the bad luck to have the slowest horses in the race, and lagged behind the other two by the distance of a well-thrown spear. And last of all, after all the rest, Eumelus came in, rustling his horses before him, and dragging with one arm his elegant chariot through the dust, and leaving a deep track in the earth.

And Achilles was sorry to see such a miserable sight, so he stood before the Argives and spoke, saying :

“The man who came last is our best man with the horses. So come now! Let’s be reasonable, and give him second place. But we shall say that Tydeus’ son has taken the race.”

Thus spoke Achilles, and the assembly agreed with him. So now the pregnant mare would have been given to Eumelus—and the whole assembly agreed with him—but son of Nestor Antilochus came forward and stood before Achilles, and questioned the decision of the people, and demanded his rightful award as winner of second place. So he said :

“Master Achilles, I am very angry with this ending. You would deprive me of my rightful prize, defying the rules, because of your favour for Eumelus. Yes, he’s a mighty warrior, and good man, and you rightfully sympathize with his overturning, and his horses run off to who knows where; but I should win what I have rightfully won! Perhaps if he

had made virtuous prayer to the Immortals, he wouldn't have walked over the finish line in last place. If you are so partial to the man, and have any good thought of me at all, a good soldier in our army, then why not bestow upon fine Eumelus something of the many treasures in your tent? There is much gold, and bronze, and sheep, and cattle, and handmaidens, and horses. Allow him to choose a prize from this abundance, or give him something even greater, a prize not yet offered, so the assembly will praise you and approve your judgment. But the horse is rightfully mine, and I will not hand her over. If any man wishes to fight for her, let him raise his fists."

Thus spoke Antilochus; and quick-thinking δῖος Achilles smiled at these bold words, for he saw Antilochus as a dear friend, so answered him kindly, saying :

"Antilochus, however you want it is acceptable to me. If you wish something other of my own to be given to Eumelus, then let the men go to my tent and bring here the breast-plate I plucked off Asteropaeus. This corselet's surely curious, with rings of ivory set in the bronze all around and up and down throughout, making the armour shine out with various colours. Eumelus should receive it as a suitably brilliant prize."

Thus spoke Achilles, and asked of his close friend Automedon to race to his hut and return with the armour. This he did, then gave it over to Eumelus, who indeed received it with pleasure and appreciation. And that was the end of that.

Yet it wasn't, for Menelaus, sorely troubled at heart

with violent anger for Antilochus, stood before the people,
and a minister handed him the staff of office, then asked
for silence among the Argives. Thus Menelaus began :

“Antilochus, once upon a time you were a clever man,
but what is this you’ve worked on me? You insulted my excellence,
first by threatening both of us and all our horses with a
reckless and dangerous move, then boxed me in after it
and led the way, though your horses are inferior to mine.
Winning by trickery is dishonest and not worth the win.
So come now, Argive leaders and ministers, judge this matter
impartially; so that in years to come no Achaean shall
say to the next, ‘Menelaus beat him with lies for the prize,
and led off the mare though his own horses were inferior
and were beaten, for he himself was superior in wealth
and power, so he wasn’t beaten, but won by precedence.’
No, I don’t want that to be said. I myself will decide things.
I will take a solemn oath before everyone here that I
speak only absolute truth. A fair account of the matter
is that his recklessness almost killed us both, then he blocked me
in deliberately. So come, Antilochus! Do the right thing.
Stand by your horses and chariot; put your whip in one hand
and lay your other hand on your horses, and swear by shaker
of earth Poseidon, king of the sea, and your great-grandfather
besides, and solemnly tell us you did not use trickery
to endanger us both, or intentionally block me in
and slow me down.”

And the now-sensible Antilochus answered the leader :

“Wait now, please! Let’s all keep together here. You are a mighty

and more experienced man. I am young. I make mistakes.

You know about the errors of the young (don't you?), all the sorts of trouble one falls into intentionally, but unwittingly :

We know, too late, that the young are quick to act but slow to think.

Therefore let your heart be patient with me. You can have the horse that I have won; I give her to you. If this fails to satisfy,

I will offer you what I can from my house, and gladly hand it over. I'd rather have that, than live out the rest of my life being thought of by the gods as a swindler and a fraud."

Thus spoke the great-hearted son of Nestor. Then he led in hand the pretty mare, before the assembly, up to δῖος

Menelaus. The older man then took the lead from the youth into his hand; and his heart all the while bristled with warmth, just as early morning dew soothes the ears of the whole grains bristling ripe in the fields. Just that like was your heart brightened, Menelaus.

Then the husband of Helen answered Antilochus, saying :

"Young sir, Antilochus, think nothing of my anger, which I dismiss. Up to now you have been sensible and strong-minded.

Today, your youth outran your reason. Next time you won't be so quick to overreach your superiors. And may I admit no other Achaean could have won me over so quickly.

Indeed, you suffer much for us. You fight hard : you, your brother, your father—all good men. You show yourself faithful to our cause.

Thus to answer your benevolence I shall gave you the mare (for she is mine), so that everyone here shall know that my heart, too, is neither unfair nor unkind."

Thus spoke Menelaus, and returned the mare to Antilochus,
 who then handed it off to Noëmon, his friend, to lead it
 to the tents. Menelaus then received the shining silver
 hand-basin. Meriones was awarded the gold pieces
 for fourth place, fair requital for his position in the race.
 But the prize for fifth place, the two-handled cup, remained unclaimed.

So δῖος Achilles brought it to Nestor, and handed it
 to the old man, saying, before everyone present :

“Esteemed elder of the Achaeans, accept this valuable
 keepsake as a memory of Patroclus, for you shall never
 meet again. Ha! Argives! See how the old men win their prizes
 without even facing any competition! I don’t see
 Nestor boxing, or wrestling! Does anyone here imagine
 him entering in for the javelin throw? Or the foot-race?
 Honours come quickly once old age has slowed one down!”

Thus spoke Achilles, who gave over the treasure to Nestor,
 who received it with pleasure; then responded in kind, saying :

“Achilles, young sir, you have spoken well. My body all the way
 down to my feet is not so tireless as it was in my youth.
 The energy is gone. All that blessed energy is gone.
 These arms no longer move so easily from these old shoulders.
 No, sir, there’s no nimble boxing in me anymore. If only!
 If only I still had all my strength in me, powerful youth!
 I remember the day the Epeians were burying their king
 at Buprasium. It was King Amarynceus, and his
 sons proposed funeral-games with prizes, to honour his name
 in the hearts of the people. No man there could match me that day,

not any of the Epeians, nor the Pylians, nor the Aetolians, all fine men. I beat Clytomedes in boxing. He was Enops' son. In wrestling I beat Ancaeus of Pleuron, who was reckless enough to face me. I ran past Iphiclus in the foot-race, who was a celebrated runner on the track in those times. My spear overshot Phyleus', and Polydorus'.

It was only in the chariot race I came up short, and that was because the two sons of Actor, both desperate to beat me, envious of all my victories, worked together to take at least one first prize from out of my hands. These sons were more than twins, they were two men joined as one body. While one held the reins with an expert touch, the other held the whip and drove the horses. And so it was, once upon a time. Let the young men compete now, and enjoy the competition; this old man is out of the game. My mind is still willing, but my body isn't. But once I stood with the first of warriors, the best of heroes in those days. But that's all gone now. But come! You pay great respect to your friend with these funeral honours and I slow it down with old man's talk! I accept this kind gift with great happiness at heart that you remember me, your friend, and am honoured in this way before all of the Achaeans. May it be, in return for this kindness, that the gods grant you the grace of advancing strength, and satisfaction in your heart."

Thus spoke Nestor.

So Achilles, after hearing all, left Nestor's side. Walking down through the army, he decided on prizes for the next event, boxing. He brought in a muscular mule and tied it to a pole : a free spirit, it was unbroken at six years old, a proposition all the harder to bring under the yoke.

And for the loser he brought a two-handled cup.

Then he stood before the assembly of Argives and spoke,
saying :

“Son of Atreus, all mighty Achaeans, I invite two men,
the best we have, to raise up their fists and give us a boxing
match. He who endures, and all the Achaeans judge the winner,
can lead away this muscular mule for himself. The loser
takes this two-handled cup.”

Thus Achilles. Straightaway a man among the spectators
rose to his feet. It was Epeius, Panopeus’ son,
courageous, strong, and a champion in the art of boxing.
He put his hand on the muscular mule and spoke, saying :

“Let he who dares come forth, and fight me for the two-handled cup.
This mule, I think, is already in my hands. No Argive
here will knock me down—I say I’m the best we have.
We have better warriors, so much is certain. But which man
here is skilled in all things at once? One thing I know sure as rain
is that what I say is sure to happen just as I say it.
My acts will be as plain as my words : I will beat him into
the ground. May the gods save his bones from shattering on impact!
So let his friends stay close, to carry away the body, dead
or alive, afterwards.”

So spoke Epeius, to which no one said a word in answer.

The assembly of Achaeans sat in silence, waiting.
Euryalus alone stood up, a godlike man in physique,

son of King Mecisteus, whose father Talaus was there
 in Boeotian Thebes when Oedipus, even he, was put
 to rest, finally; and no one there beat Eurylaus'
 grandfather, not one son of Cadmus who had taken him on.
 So Euryalus declared that he was the best of the Argives.

Supporting Euryalus was Diomedes : attending
 to him, preparing him for the fight, invigorating him
 with words, and very much wishing for his victory.

First, the leather belt was secured round his waist. Next, both his hands
 and wrists were strapped up with leather strips interwoven so that
 his hands looked thatched like the side of a chariot-box. The well-cut
 hide from an ox of the field would protect his fingers and knuckles.

So the two men, when their belts and gloves were secure,
 stepped up face-to-face in the middle of the wide-open plain;
 and sitting nearby was the assembly of spectators.

Each man raised his huge fists up against the other
 and got into it. Their hands showered quick incoming punches,
 tremendous blows loud as slams of waves on ships asea.
 Awful was the sound of the grinding of their teeth
 and they gushed sweat from top to toe. Then δῖος Epeius,
 his eyes taking the entirety of his opponent's presence
 at once, saw a fleeting loss of concentration in the best
 the Argives had, so sent an uppercut to his jaw, and that
 was that for Euryalus and tragic Theban Oedipus.
 The lightning-strong collision lifted the best into the air,
 and his body went slack while electricity in his head
 delivered spots to his eyes, just as when a ripple races

down the sea-surface and fish leap up and arc into the wind :
 even so did Euryalus see sparks as he hit the ground,
 like a fish leaping up only to land on a weedy shore.
 The decision among the Achaeans was unanimous :
 knockout. Then great-hearted Epeius reached out and lifted up
 Euryalus' body from the dust, and kept him upright
 on his feet until his friends gathered round and escorted his
 slumped limbs away, with his feet dragging a trail after him
 and his head leaning to one side as he spit out an abundance
 of blood. So they carried him, concussed and muttering nonsense,
 away from the people; and his friends fetched the two-handled cup.

Achilles then brought forward in sight of all the Danaans
 the prizes for the third competition, strenuous wrestling.
 The winner received a cauldron made to go upon the fire.
 The spectators, by general consensus, estimated its worth
 at twelve oxen. For the loser Achilles exhibited
 a woman, declaring that she had much know-how in her hands.
 For her they reckoned a value of four head of cattle.

And Achilles addressed the crowd :

“Stand up two of you and put your wrestling mettle to the test.”

Thus spoke Achilles, and Ajax got to his feet, Telamonian
 Ajax. And then πολύμητις Odysseus stood, master
 of much subtle art. After stretching and flexing their muscles,
 the two men came up to each other in the wrestling square
 by the assembly of spectators. They caught hold of each
 other with their massive arms and their hard muscular hands,
 striving up close each against the other, just as the cross-beams

of a high pitched-roof shudders in a vigorous wind, yet holds together, as made by an excellent craftsman of joining, and that which is inside stays safe. The vertebrae of both men cracked out loud under the press of each other's confident arms while sweat gushed all over their bodies. And as the violence intensified bruises were already swelling up by their ribs and shoulders, the dark blood blistering out and discolouring their skin; and each resolutely strove for the victory of the practicable cauldron. Odysseus made to bring down Ajax more than a few times, but Ajax supported his attacks and stayed upright on his feet. Yet Ajax, too, had no success in getting Odysseus down, for the Ithacan's mighty strength held balanced. When finally the spectators had had enough of the stalemate and their minds began to wander, Ajax spoke to Odysseus, saying :

"Ithacan, do something. Either you pick me up, or I you.
This is it : let Zeus decide it."

And so Ajax lifted Odysseus, but in the process failed to remember the πολύμητις part.

So clever Odysseus, up in the air, kicked with his foot right at the inside bend of Ajax's knee, and hit the mark precisely, and set the strength free from mighty Ajax's leg. He fell backward and sprawled in the dirt, and Odysseus dropped onto his chest, and the assembly of spectators looked on with incredulity. Then much-enduring δῖος Odysseus took his turn to lift Telamonian Ajax; and indeed Ajax's body began to rise from the ground, but only just, for that was beyond even Odysseus,

whose own knee now buckled from Ajax's weight. He fell to earth beside him, and the pair grappled intensely, and were covered in dust. Each endeavoured to pin the other to no avail. So they agreed to stand up in starter's position again, and continue wrestling until perhaps time immemorial, but Achilles stood up and brought it to a decision, saying :

"No further with this, please. We cannot have two of our best men worn down to nothing for prizes! Let us say both men have won equally. Take your equal prizes so we may continue, and allow other Achaeans a chance to win a victory."

Thus spoke Achilles smiling, and the two men heard and obeyed. So they wiped the dust off their bodies and put on their tunics. And the assembly wondered how a woman might be shared.

Thus the games continued. And Achilles displayed the prizes for the next competition, the foot-race. The assembly admired the shining silver mixing bowl set out for first place : it was a beautifully-made piece, accommodating six measures, and consensus made the bowl the most marvellous of all in civilization, since its artist was Sidonian.

All knew that the land of Sidonia produced magnificent artwork, and the mixing bowl dazzled with elaborate touches skillfully-wrought. Some Phoenician men sailed out of the sea haze, and came to harbour with it, and gifted it to Thoas as a kind greeting to the king of the territory, Lemnos.

Later, the bowl liberated poor, now-dead Lycaon, when Jason's son Euneos gave it up as ransom to good Patroclus.

Achilles set out this bowl, a prize in honour of his friend, for the man who proved fastest of foot. Second prize was an ox

heavy with rich fat; and a piece of gold, half a pound in weight,
was available for last place.

And Achilles addressed the crowd :

“Stand up, all those willing to try their fortune in the foot-race.”

Thus he spoke, and straightaway Ajax rose, son of Oïleus;
also Odysseus πολύμητις ; and Nestor’s son Antilochus,
for he indeed was thought to have the fastest feet of all young
men in the army. So they stood ordered at the starting line;
then Achilles determined the distance, and a course was scratched
out of the dust to a line that would act as a turning-point.

Quickly then the son of Oïleus took the lead, and Odysseus
rushed furiously onward exceedingly close behind, as close
as the shuttle reaches the breast of a woman carefully
weaving the string around the warp, ever drawing the shuttle close
as she fashions the artful clothing draped around her body;
just so close came Odysseus. His feet stamped through the footsteps
of Ajax before the dust could fall back into the shape there,
and Ajax felt the breath of δῖος Odysseus on the back
of his neck, as he ran full-out to maintain his lead. And all
the spectators shouted together motivating him onward
as he stretched himself further in his hunger for victory,
so he came to the uttermost of his possibility.

It was then, along the straightaway heading to the finish
line, that Odysseus prayed to old friend Athena Bright-Eyes,
saying :

“Help me, o good goddess. Enhance my feet and increase my speed.”

So prayed Odysseus as he ran, and she heard him, goddess
of Victory, Athena : saver, protectress, healer. At once
he felt light as air, moving as easy as a breeze, or as
a free bird flies. In his hands and feet he felt younger than youth,
and he saw himself closing in on crossing the finish line,
with Ajax speeding side by side and stride for stride.

Then the goddess showed what she was happily capable of.
Ajax inexplicably tripped up on the filth dropped by the bellowing cattle
sacrificed by Achilles in honour of fallen Patroclus.
So now Ajax fell to earth, and the filth of the oxen stuffed
his nose and mouth. So Odysseus lifted the mixing bowl,
having come in first, and Ajax, shining with sweat, took the ox,
while spitting the field-nourished filth out of his mouth.

And Ajax spoke among the assembly of Argives :

“ὦ πόποι ! Athena goddess tripped me up, she who stands by
Odysseus like a mother, always bringing him slippery help!”

Thus spoke Ajax, and the assembly laughed good-naturedly.

And Antilochus, thought to have the fastest feet of all young
men in the army, carried off the mere heavy piece of gold,
the prize for last place. But he was smiling, and spoke out to all :

“Those who can hear what I say, get a load of the following!
My friends, Ajax is only a bit older than I, but now
Odysseus! Light in feet, sure, but also heavy in age!

And yet we see the difficulty for Achaeans of any age to compete with his wondrous speed. Hence I solemnly say to all here present that the beloved gods up in heaven sure know how to season one's legs, to give honour to old men! May I one day be old enough to be given similar favour from the gods!"

Thus Antilochus wisecracked, and the crowd laughed good-naturedly.

And great-hearted Achilles laughed with all the rest, and the crowd thereby laughed all the more vigorously. Then Achilles spoke :

"Antilochus, your words are well-said, and shall not be idly heard, especially, we hope, by our esteemed Odysseus, whose friends in high places cannot be beat!"

And Odysseus only shrugged, like when Michael Jordan hit six threes in quick succession in the '92 Finals.

And Achilles continued to Antilochus, saying :

"For you a half-measure of gold is added to your earned prize."

Thus he spoke, and handed over the gold, and Antilochus received the heavy weight gladly in his hands. Next, Achilles brought a spear before the eyes of the assembly, and a shield, and a helmet, and set them together on display : it was the armour of Sarpedon, who was deprived of everything now by Patroclus. And Achilles addressed the assembly :

"I invite two men, two warriors, each who would be the best, to put on their armour, and hold the bronze, and bring to the test

their genius for fighting, before all of us in the army.

Whichever of the two men is first to scratch the skin of the other, and draw the dark blood, shall take into his hand, to have, this silver-studded beauty, a Thracian sword I plucked from Asteropaeus in the river. And this armour shall be taken by both men to split among them as they wish. And a magnificent feast by the tents shall be spread before these meritorious warriors.”

Thus spoke Achilles, and Telamonian Ajax got to his feet, tremendous in presence. And mighty Diomedes, younger in age, rose, and the pair suited up in their apparel of war, and came out from opposite sides before the assembly of wide-eyed spectators, each approaching the other raging to fight, staring down each other as they came : and the assembly looked on with awe. In the two men before them, the Argives saw the strengthened force of the entire Argive army. Then when they were close, they clashed with no inconsequential blows, and three times each scratched the armour of the other. And the assembly came to realize they were watching no game, but true face-to-face combat, and behemoth Ajax sent out an incendiating spear thrust that sent Diomedes teetertottering, incomprehensibly to him, as his breast-plate echoed with the memory of Ajax’s power : Diomedes then raised his spear-point to send it through the neck of his ally the colossal Ajax. Then Achilles and the others leapt up from the audience and stopped the fighting, and asked them to take prizes of equitable value. Even so, Achilles gave the silver-studded sword to Diomedes, along with sheath and belt, both beautifully cut.

Then Achilles held before the eyes of the assembly a marvellous weight fallen from the sky, a platinum-grey parcel of meteoric iron, high in his two hands, implicit with crystalline flakes, like so many pinpoints of gathered sun, dazzling sight. In earlier times, Eëtion, king of Thebe Hypoplakia,

liked to cast it as a discus flies with his colossal strength.
 But now he was dead, by the hands of quick-moving δῖος Achilles,
 who had stolen, along with his life, all the man's other treasures,
 including this marvel, carried here by Achilles' ships
 after that famous raid during the years of the Trojan War.

And Achilles hardly had to speak, for all the spectators
 were spellbound with his prize. Some thought it beautiful beyond words;
 while others, from places with fields far off from people, foresaw
 a welcome rest from heaving it down to town for raw iron
 to make tools for a herdsman or ploughman : this lump would supply
 all a farm's needs for five complete revolutions of the stars.

So the meteoric iron remained on display before
 the assembly of Achaeans, while Achilles arranged
 for the final competition. He had his men take a mast
 from a dark-prowed ship and fix it upright far off in the sand
 on the beach. Then he took a graceful, shining-white dove, and tied,
 lightly, one foot, with a long fine thread, to the mast. There, the bird
 flitted about, unable to escape.

And Achilles addressed the crowd :

"Whichever of our archers liberates this beautiful dove
 from the string, takes home the beautiful iron. If you fail,
 you win the weight of ten single-bladed axe-heads—a great prize,
 yet not so wondrous!"

Thus he said, and master bowman Teucer got to his feet, sure
 to set the bird free and take the marvellous prize. Meriones,
 however, most faithful friend of Idomeneus, stood up.
 So the two tossed pebbles into a bronze helmet, which rattled

out Teucer's pebble first, who then smiled at his good fortune,
 lifted up his bow, strung an arrow, and, before a prayer
 said to Apollo, he let fly, and the arrow of Teucer,
 with its sharp point, came to the long, fine thread,
 and the spectators held their breath : then saw the bird
 still flitting round the mast, tied there haplessly. Teucer had missed.

It was hard to believe, unless you knew he failed to pray
 to Apollo, who made him miss for his stubborn transgression.

Meriones, however, spoke out in his heart, saying :

"Splendid Apollo, golden helper, one more time, be with me.
 For you I offer a hecatomb of firstlings from the lambs."

Meriones, then, strung his bow and let fly, and his arrow
 cut clean through the cord, and the dove eagerly
 flew off up into the sky toward heaven, and all the people
 cheered, for all the length of time it took for the string to float back
 to earth : and the shouts and applause of the Achaeans were like
 the sound of rushing water.

And the dove spread its many-layered wings out high in the air,
 circling over their heads; and master Teucer vowed never
 to forget his god ever again : Far-reaching Healing Apollo.

Then Achilles revealed a striking spear, carved up and down
 with exquisite flowerwork, and the javelin men stood up,
 but in this case they were pleasantly mistaken.

And Achilles addressed Agamemnon :

“Son of Atreus, all here know of your superiority.

This is yours on behalf of the army, to take to your ships.

But if you would have it put into the hands of a soldier,
and your heart allows this to be, then I shall do this for you.”

And Agamemnon, beaming with pride, consented to this wish.

So Achilles, destroyer of cities, handed the spear to Thersites.

End of Bk XXIII

Book XXIV

Thus the funeral games ended. And the people scattered back
to their tents, each man to his own precious ship, as at seedtime
the air delapses with pollen. They thought of supper and sleep
as light processed from sky, obeying the departure of the sun.
The season of the Trojan War was a-coming to an end,
though no-one down below on miserable earth yet knew it.
No one but Achilles, who knew not what, but resurrecting
his beloved in his head kept him tossing and turning this way
and that all the nights long in bed. He did not know how many
nights long he lay in bed, longing for the noble Patroclus,
loving with deep regret his goodness and courage and power
and manhood. The earth had taken away the good and the brave.
All-taming sleep unable to subdue him, he'd think of all
the odyssey of hassle they experienced together,
the many outrageously accomplished triumphs,
as they fought their way through men's wars and the omnifical waves.
Achilles thought with yearning on all this, turning himself from
one side to the other under the stars. When he considered
the hard way Patroclus had taken, and of himself as well,
everything revolving in his mind like a whirling Xanthus,
then tears dropped from his eyes and drowned his heart,
as he tossed and turned this way and that all the nights long in bed.
He lay even full on his face, frantic with pain, sounding out.
How could he put a limit on a loss of one so beloved?
So then he would get to his feet and go his solitary
way to the shore by the massive wavering sea,
in the darkest hour of night, as rest wearied him; alone,
untouched, fretted with grief all over, possessed of Patroclus
caught in pale immortal death, he wandered the lonely shore,

the sea acceding glistening up the sand, then retracting
back into the wild unconfined. Where his mother was,
who had not told him the truth of things, though she knew how things were.
Though Dawn came gliscent over the sea and the sands, revealing
herself fully to him, to give her light, he didn't notice.
With heart infracted he'd put his horses to, no matter the time,
and tether the body of Hector to the back of his car,
to drag him : and quickly galloping in circles three times round
the tomb of Patroclus Achilles dragged Hector, face downward,
so that he might scrape away every last bit of flesh from the bones.
Then, having brought new tears to Hector, Achilles would leave off,
and return to his tent, and let the body lie where it was,
lying low outstretched in the dust, face downwards.

So in this way ferocious Achilles disfigured the corpse
of δῖος Hector; and elsewhere and everywhere the gods,
convened in their open space, looked down on this maltreatment,
and the happy gods actually pitied the fallen Trojan hero.
So they encouraged sharp-sighted Hermes, slayer of hundred-
eyed Argus, to steal the corpse out from under crazy Achilles.
This plan the gods found agreeable, but for the faction of
Hera and Poseidon and the gleaming-eyed girl. The women
in this triumvirate persisted in antagonism
because of some distant indiscretion that goddesses never
forget. Back at the first they had come to Priam,
to stop the war before it began. The war was an answer
to the sinful idiocy of Alexandros, but each
action has more than one answer to it; hence the goddesses down
inside the lofty palace of Priam. Now the story is
fuzzy here, but it was possible Priam humiliated them
by showing favour to the cataclysmic Helen, and blaming

them, actually blaming Hera and Athena, for Helen's rebellious behaviour. The goddesses left Troy wondering why a man would choose a whore over a goddess.

Up in the heavenly bodies they nurtured their animosity even to this day. And so explains the faction of the gods against Priam and Troy. As for Poseidon, they let him follow his impulses, which offered others occasions for laughter.

Then Hera spoke to Hermes :

"You who spread your tricky arts from heaven down to Hades, shall you not find it funny to confuse the rage of Achilles?"

And Hermes was up for it. But such disputes in Heaven durate for ages. So Dawn suffered coming for the twelfth time without Achilles noticing her body of light, before Healer Apollo responded, saying :

"Ah, loving stepmother, sweet rose of virtue and gentleness, richest of us all in abundance in charm, but also in mercilessness! You goddesses are wicked workers. What has Hector ever done to you—but give you the best pieces of spotless sacrifices? You'd save him now, and have his wife look onto him now? Cruel sight for her to see, too cruel for mortals to endure. Only now, after you got him dead, you want to celebrate his honour with a monument over his bones, and the due obsequies for heroes, with Priam, Hecuba, and the people mourning in solemnity. No, this is too perverse to keep putting into words! Meanwhile, you celebrate crazy Achilles, who seems lacking in a single sensible thought in his head! Worse, he's adamant against deserting his erroneous ways.

He's simply evil, a death-fated mortal with a mind crazy
 and stubborn, a mad dog without sense of measure in his heart.
 This man, whom the swarming Achaeans hail as their hero,
 drags a dead body behind him from the back of a chariot!
 The man actually bends down and fastens the corpse tight, with care.
 What good can come from a man like that? And why encourage him?
 I say he should start fearing our displeasure at his actions,
 which have nothing good or pretty about them. What obtusion!
 Continuously he drags behind him a bundle of senseless dust!
 This is the mortal man you want all of us to get behind?"

Such words incensed Queen Hera to great anger, and she replied :

"So you say, Apollo, but your words aren't nearly as accurate
 as your famous silver bow. If you would be so solicitous
 with the dead Hector, why not allow one and the same respect
 to the living Achilles? Hector is all mortal (as far back
 as I can remember), while the mother of Achilles
 is a goddess! And if mortals please you so well, his father
 was a mere man, too. You, whose fingertips strum the curvaceous
 lyre, speak such rubbish sometimes! All this talk of Achilles
 you should know, Apollo Seer, since you attended his father's wedding!
 You sat there at the feast, that lyre in your hands! Obviously,
 then, you're a friend to wickedness (ah, wicked Achilles!)
 and not to be trusted."

And at this, Apollo replied that he had no memory
 of any mortal's wedding, and refused to speak any more.

Gleaming-eyed Athena then spoke out, saying :

“Apollo, I will recall it all to you; and with these words
you may come to understand Achilles a little better.

Our Queen Hera’s fondness with Achilles began when Zeus Father
restrained (for once) his passion for the mother, thereby granting
disgustful Hera a victory. At first, his warmth outran his reason,
until he overheard (for Father hears all) a prophecy
delivered to Thetis from the shifty Old Man of the Sea.

He told her : ‘You shall bring forth a child stronger than the father.’
When Zeus heard this, hot though the fires of love were burning in him,
he demurred from further interaction with Thetis, famous
for her free-spirited nakedness as her common, so-to-speak,
day- and night-wear. But for reasons only our father knows of,
he put the goddess into the hands of his son Aeacides,
and advised him to allow heaven’s own grandson, Peleus,
to take his chances with the curvaceous aqueous goddess.

Now sparkling Haemonia-on-the-sea, its shoreline curved
outward like a bow, was an accustomed place to find Thetis,
for there was a cave there, obscured in a grove of olive trees,
where she was wont to rest. So Thetis came, astride her bridled
dolphin in all her shapely nakedness, when out jumped the bold
Peleus, who wrestled with her, at first playfully, then more
and more strenuously as Thetis resisted the mere man’s
advances. Inside her cave, its curvature glowing with green algae,
she shape-shifted to a bird, but Peleus held firm to the feathers;
then stood stolid as a tree, but Peleus held her fast in his arms;
then, third, she came as a dappled tigress. It was at that point
that Peleus quit and fled. But her beauty was such that he
sought out a soothsayer, who gave him subtly-snaring cords,
which, he promised, would hold tenaciously anything they gripped.

He also gave advice : ‘O sir,’ he said, ‘though she may imitate through a hundred feigned forms and figures while caught on the bed, keep hold, for finally she will metamorphose back to herself.’

So he returned to the cave in the olive grove by the sea, and the beautiful goddess was asleep when he tied her up; then he meant to have his way with her. And Thetis imitated a hundred forms in his arms, but he held on; and finally she stopped, and said : ‘Curious as this sounds, you being here on me was meant to be, for only a god would allow this.’ And so Thetis then meant to wrap her arms around Peleus and yield to love, only to notice her arms and legs were still spread out and fastened by the magical bonds. And Thetis said : ‘Darling, don’t untie them.’ That’s the story of the conception of Achilles.”

Thus spoke Athena.

Then came the orderer of all things, Zeus. Nothing did he dread, but was ever dreaded. He answered his gleaming-eyed daughter, and his wife, and all of them in Heaven, saying :

“My Immortals, here and now, cease this divisiveness! I will decide : The respect we show to each man shall not be equal. Hector was as decent as a man can be down there in Troy. He knew right from wrong in his heart, and not from rote. And he often sent out wondrous fragrances from the flames of his altar, up to all that is ours, as appointed by Destiny. His devotion I’ll remember with affection. But as for stealing any dead bodies, no, this will not do. I, though, have an idea, that shall be followed to the letter.

Perhaps someone shall summon goddess Thetis here to my side,
so I may speak some words of wisdom into her ear, namely
that Achilles acquiesce, and accept gifts from King Priam,
and give the body back.”

Thus Zeus; so air-crossing Iris goddess sprung to it, and sped
away down to earth, bearing a message from the Orderer.
And somewhere in the sea between island Samos and rocky
Imbros, with Helicon shining in the distance, goddess Iris,
dewy with living hues, dived down into the immersive dark
of the sea, and the waters roared over her, sealing her in.
She sank as fast as a pillar of light implants the sea, or
as a lead sinker, joined with an ox-horn, plummets at speed,
bringing treacherous death to the gullible and the baited.
Indeed, Iris brought quick destruction to all fishes and sea-
monsters who came too close with their sharp teeth bared.
So she came to a luminous cave where many naked nymphs
of the sea were assembled together, consoling Thetis
in their midst, for the mother shed many a tear for her son.
Of his destiny there in Troy, she knew, but had no answer.
The wonder Thetis felt was something she never felt before.

And wind-swift Iris, among the glowworms and weedy algae,
came close, and spoke to her, saying :

“Up! Up, Thetis! Zeus Ineluctable summons you to him!”

Then the goddess, low in variegations of silvery
foam, spoke out through her weeping, to reply :

“What does he want from me now? To see the shame of all my griefs

up close and plain on my face? And to be seen among them now, considering what my son is doing—no, that’s not a pleasant invitation. Yet I must go. What can one do, when the God has spoken His word?”

Thus Thetis. So, to match her mood, she wrapped her shapely body in one long wind of dark linen, and straightened a dark veil over her wondrous face, then hastened to go, following swift, wind-walking Iris on the way. And the sea, drawn onward and back, according to the hour, now withdrew down themselves while they streamed up the depths of the sea and came to the sands of the shore. Then they shot straight up into the open space of heaven. There, they entered the presence of all those who shall live forever.

So while the gods were enjoying forever, Zeus Father spirited Thetis away (under Hera’s watchful notice) to a private spot of space. And he sat beside the grieving goddess, and offered her a golden cup of ambrosia, delivering subtle lines of sympathy while she drank; then she returned the cup to her long-ago would-be lover Zeus, foremost of gods and men in all things, who looked into her eyes with heart-breaking sympathy. He sidled ever closer to the tender, shapely goddess; and her grief made her sorrow sadder, and it grieved him sore to see her weep. Then he began to speak, using words courteous, mild, meek, and well-devised :

“Be still, my darling, rest awhile; and when we’re done, perhaps sweetly smile? Sweet Thetis, I know full well why you sit this way on Olympus. I, too, grieve terribly for your Achilles. And though your grief may be comfortless, perhaps I can comfort you in some manner? Do you hear these words I whisper? I know

your heart (which is why you are here). All this trouble down below
 has brought itself up into heaven. For a barely endurable
 duration of time the Immortals have set to quarrelling
 on a subject touching the body of the other, and on
 your Achilles, heroic wrecker of cities. The others
 would snatch that abominable body from your Achilles,
 and encourage Hermes to bring off their pleasure.
 My affection, though, sweet Thetis (and you may come
 closer), is with Achilles. And I treasure the affection
 and the love that you and I feel for one another! Deeply
 I do, my enchanting fresh-faced goddess, scented of the sea.
 So hear now what I can do for you. Straightaway go down (but
 not yet) to the Argive army, and deliver to your son
 the following helpful aid. Explain to the hero, the wrecker
 of cities, that all the other gods are aroused in their hearts
 with anger at his passion, and would have him punished, but Zeus,
 however, has a care to make things straight for all parties concerned;
 and suggest in your way to the wrecker of cities that he
 return the body to its rightful place. With this Word, we shall see
 if he fears me. And goddess Iris I will send to Priam,
 to seek release of the body by bearing an endowment
 of gifts to Achilles, which may bring your son satisfaction."

Thus spoke Zeus, king of men and gods.

And goddess Thetis sped like fleeting years down from the summit
 of gods to the battlefield, and to the tent of her son. Inside,
 he sat sighing in a desolate air, and his friends were quiet
 around him as they briskly prepared their breakfast.

His mother sank ladylike down by his side, and took his hand,

and called him by his name, and said :

“Child, how long will you weep this way? How long will your soul stay troubled? You think neither of food nor of sleep. And no woman lies by your side. Achilles, I’m sorry I did not tell you all I knew of fate invulnerable. I thought it for the best.”

And Achilles spoke out, as if he hadn’t heard her, saying :

“Ah, God. *If my love were in my arms, and I in bed again.*
Could you do this for me, Zeus, if you wanted to? But you won’t.
Piety is powerless against death, isn’t that as it is?”

And his mother answered him :

“Listen now to what I say to you. I come with a message.
The gods you’re now scorning are already in a state of hate for you, and Zeus himself is, shall we say, taking an interest.
Come now! It will be best for everyone if you quit your rage, and stop all this with Hector by the ships. Give the body back.
Hear me. Son! Give the body back, and accept some recompense.”

And Achilles answered :

“Okay.”

Thus, in this way, mother and son spoke together by the ships.

Meantime, Time itself brought Iris Wind-Walker to sacred Troy, for Zeus had a plan :

“Up!” he said, “Up, Iris! Go from the open space of Olympus
 down to strong-standing Troy himself, Priam, and enlighten him
 that the better way to proceed from the present is to give
 gifts to Achilles, if Priam and Troy would have Hector back.
 Let him go, if he determines that his gifts are such that will
 mollify the heart of Achilles. And he will go alone.
 No Trojan shall walk beside him. But I have no care if he
 chooses a helper, an older man, to work the wagon, and
 steer the mules, so that the bodies of the dead may be brought
 back to the city, all those men killed by δῖος Achilles.
 We shall have Hermes, who knows all the ways, accompany him,
 till Priam is brought near to the mighty presence of Achilles.
 And when the old man is led into the tent of Achilles,
 and the two men look into each other’s faces, let us see
 how much wisdom may be inside our beloved δῖος Achilles.
 If I am correct, dear Iris, the boy is not senseless, not
 aimless, and not wicked. I say he will spare old King Priam.”

This was the word of Zeus. So Iris rode in with the storm clouds
 to Troy, to bring the Word of God to the old man. She entered
 the palace and heard all its halls echoing with wailing,
 men and women weeping, and their mingled outcry was chilling
 to hear. She wandered down to the outdoor courtyard, where the sons
 sat round their father, all with heads bowed, and tears dropping to earth.
 Priam sat in the centre wrapped up in clothing made filthy
 by all his rolling and writhing in the dust. And now he sat
 spent, with a handful of dust in his lap, and his eyes fixed some-
 where. And coming from the house all round him were the wailings
 of women : his daughters and his sons’ wives mourning the good men
 gone down under the earth, destroyed by the hands of the Argives.

And then it was night, and Priam sat where he was, even there under the stars, in his filthy garments. His sons, too, were there, but they lay asleep variously round him; and he, too, slept. It was then that Iris goddess stepped to the king, and whispered into his ear, and as she spoke, a trembling took hold of him, for she delivered the message, and a part of him expected an ill welcome from the Achaean warriors.

“Courage, Priam!” said Iris, who entered his mind as ever-reshaping colours, then disappeared; and the old man awoke with a grim foreboding in his heart. Still and all, King Priam followed his night-thoughts, and requested of his sons to prepare the four-wheeled wagon and the mules that pulled it, and specified that the wicker basket be placed on the bed of the wagon.

Then old man Priam led Hecuba his wife down under the palace to the storeroom of treasures, a private spot with wide-arched ceiling and air scented with cedar, where much jewellery was kept. And he spoke to his wife, the Queen, and said :

“Good lady, my sleep brought me a Word from the gods. I’m to go now to claim the body of our great son, in the hope that I may mollify the murderer’s heart with gifts. What do you think? The idea to me is exceeding strange, but my heart commands me to cross the plain and enter into the camp of the Achaeans.”

And Hecuba cried out when she heard this, and answered him with :

“Disaster. What of that man whom men in places all over speak of as a master of masters? And what of the people you rule? It will be said you chose to go on your own, to see

with your own eyes the man who has stripped you of so many sons,
 strong and courageous sons. Your sleep has shaped your heart into stone!
 If you catch his eyesight, he'll kill you. He won't show you pity.
 He is a cruel and wicked man. We might almost say a beast
 of prey. This faithless man will show you no mercy.

Let's you and I leave everything for all the others to work.
 You and I must mourn, as we can, here in the house,
 far from our son. That was Destiny's work, who laid out the thread
 of his life when he came from inside me. How can we know why
 Destiny would leave him to the dogs? I would bury my teeth
 in that man, if chance allowed for it. I would feed as the dogs
 feed till not one particle was left. Then my revenge were done.
 For our son fell with honour, standing firm, defending our Troy,
 protecting the women and the men. He stood firmly in place,
 mindful only of protection, with not a thought of escape."

And her husband answered her :

"I cannot be held back, so please allow yourself to trust me.
 Please no twittering like a caught bird of omen in our halls.
 I seem to have no choice, and that is how it will be. I wasn't
 made to believe from the words of a priest, or the visions
 of a seer. I saw the goddess myself, and heard her voice.
 So I will go. For how will we fare if we leave her word undone?
 If my fate is to be cut down by those damned Achaean ships,
 then that is what it will be. Achilles himself can have me,
 if only after I have one last embrace of my son."

Thus was the word of Priam, the king of long-enduring Troy.

And then he went among his cherished treasures, lifting the lid of one chest after another, and gathered together twelve garments exceptionally beautiful in hand-work, each weighted with personal meaning to the king. These elaborate robes he placed, still squarely folded, in a pile beside the chests; and all this before him expressed memories of his lifetime with his wife, and his family, and his people, and his city. The selection of the gifts followed an uncommunicated sense in his heart, for better or worse, rather than following his reason, and choice. So, alongside the splendiferous robes he lay twelve simple cloaks; and twelve coverlets, which could be laid over thrones, to warm them, adding comfort. And twelve tunics were placed atop the cloaks. Carefully, then, he weighed out ten measures of gold. And to the glittering gifts he added two delicate pitchers; and four very beautiful cauldrons, looking a-blaze with light; and also a cup, that the men of Thrace had given him, when he had gone there on an embassy : a great item to the king. There was nothing in his Halls that the king would not have added to the gifts, for his one thought now was to reclaim the body of his son.

Then he came out to the light of the sun, and stood in his court, and saw Trojan men standing everywhere, and the king attacked them with abusive words, saying :

“Disappear, all you shameful spectators! What do you see here that appeals to you so much? Would you rather no one lead you? Haven’t you enough grief of your own to suffer in your own homes? Yet you come here to see every step I take. A light matter, you think, that one should lose the best of oneself? Because of the decision of our god? A light matter, that the best of you, too,

is gone? He who saved many a person standing here? How much easier do you think it will be for Achilles to strike you down now? This is the word of your king you hear, what you deserve to hear, and to have : I hope I step into Hades with my back to the fall and slaughter of Troy.”

Thus Priam. Holding his staff of office he stepped toward the men. In reply the men scattered busily out of the courtyard and away from the palace of Troy. Then the king summoned his sons, who gathered by him : Helenus τε Alexandros τ’ Agathon τε Pammon τ’ Antiphonus τε Polites, τε Deiphobus τε καὶ Hippothous καὶ goodly Dius.

The old man spoke to these nine men, and gave command :

“Get going, all of you failures! I have you all at the price of Hector. Ah, God. I am utterly ill-fated in all ways, yet never knew it—till now. I brought the best sons into Troy, into great Troy, and not one is left behind. Mestor, Troilus, Hector—he who seemed the son of no man but of a god—” Ἄρης has destroyed them all. Who survives now are the weak ones, the cowards, those worthy of disgust : fake men, great at the dance. You have no care but to ruin all that is best of your city to satisfy your own sorry selves. You rob the kids from your own people! Common robbers of lambs! You harm the prosperity of your many Trojans for your own low selves? It’s atrocious to think on any further. Quickly now, use your feet, prepare a wagon, and put in it all the treasures piled in our storeroom.”

Thus was the word of the king. So, for a time, all of these men worked in harmony together, and created a fine sight to see.

As they worked, they also remembered, with terror, their father's threatening tone, which contributed to their exacting care.

They brought out a four-wheeléd wagon meant to be mule-drawn. It was a handsome piece, newmade. The wicker basket was put inside. Then they took down the yoke for the mules. Of box-wood was the yoke made, and fitted with rings to receive all the reins prevailed to guide the mules. This yoke they tied to the pole of the wagon—polished, smoothed, glazy—with a securely-stitched yoke-band nine ancient cubits long. They wound the band three times round till it was tight, then took in the slack with a knot underneath. Now the yoke for the mules was tied to the pole of the wagon.

Then up from the underground storeroom came the many treasures, too valuable to quantify, meant as ransom for the body of Hector; and the brothers placed everything into the well-polished wagon. Then they yoked the strong-hoofed mules, serene-working in harness, which long ago the Mysians, famed for their wondrous animals, had given to the king for his own private use, a kind gift.

And Hecuba stepped up to her husband, sorrowing at heart. She held out in her right hand a golden cup of honey-sweet wine, so that he might pour to the gods before his departure. So she stood by the animals, and voiced an out-of-the-ordinary question to her husband :

“Come! Come and pour for Father Zeus, and pray to return home from there, from those hateful creatures, those demons. All this work is strange to me, yet resolutely you continue, so I shall say no more but pray to the God of Time, the son of Cronos, the manipulator of clouds

from Ida's peak. From there he sees all of us down on the plain;
 pray to him. Ask him for a sign; let us see what he shows us.
 Let his bird of omen come to us, the bird of prey, his strength
 coming up on the right hand, and by that you shall know safety
 along your passage to the ships of the extreme Achaeans.
 But if the god who hears and knows everything decides to show
 us nothing auspicious, then I call on you to turn around,
 and even in your eagerness to go forth to the Argives,
 do not go."

Then Priam, king of Troy, answered his wife, saying :

"My good wife, you ask me to bend the knee to the god who took
 everything from us, and will keep doing so, until we're no more.
 Why things are as they are does not bear looking into closely,
 for fear of what might we discover of ourselves in our hearts.
 Yet, perhaps we might receive everything that happens to us
 as a testing, which demands us to face suffering with strength,
 or live with the consequences of what we've chosen to be—
 weak. If we allow life to beat us down to nothing, what were we
 worth in the first place? Through suffering we come to know what we are.
 Along no other path do we come to Truth. Like it or not : as the gods will it.

So I shall obey you. I will lift up my face to the one
 who took everything, Zeus, and pray for him to show us mercy."

Thus spoke Priam. He requested of his housekeeper to pour
 water over his hands. So she came with the pure, clear water,
 and stood by him with pitcher and silver basin in her hands.
 And the basin was carved all round with imagery of Troy,
 memories of the duration of its glorious history.

And so she poured the water and he washed his hands.

Then Hecuba his wife poured the wine-offering on the earth.

Wife and husband then took hands, and knelt, and looked up to the sky,
and the man began to pray aloud for all of them, saying :

“Origin and orderer of all things past, present, and to come,
who looks down on us, who sternly keeps us in our place,
whether we remember you or not—and it is Sin to forget you,
you whose power makes a toy of ours;—To you I pray we come
to Achilles unharmed. And, inside his tent, we are welcomed,
and respected in our low position. If you hear me now,
Zeus, bring confidence to our way, show us all is not lost, yet;
may the sky bring us the bird of omen, your beloved bird
of the infinite air, the mighty bird of prey with outstretched
wings and great strength, rising in the east, and I see, with my
eyes, that my way forward will be the beginning of my return.
I will survive the galloping tread of the strong Achaeans.”

Thus was the prayer of the husband, knelt beside Hecuba,
in the open-air court, bound within colonnades of pillars.

And Zeus Counsellor heard, and an eagle came up clear and sure
with fully-outstretched wings : dark hunter whom men call Black Eagle.
Its wings stretched as wide as the door of a storeroom, the hand-work
well-confining, with the strong bolts barring the treasures inside;
just so wide were the open wings of the eagle rising on
the right. And the whole city saw, and all the hearts were softened.

Then, briskly, with single-minded purpose, the old man stepped from

the court, and walked beside the wagon to the palace front gates, and the front gates blazed in the sun, they glowed like stargates, and they went through, out onto the plain, Idæus his helper managing the stride of the animals. Priam urged himself on, his mind like a whip that spurs the fast horses, from the city, and walked forward toward the plain. Behind him, back in the city walls, the women wailed with ululations, thinking himself walking to his death. But when he reached the plain, his sons left him, and all the wives, and turned back, to re-enter Troy.

Zeus, who is everywhere, saw the old man, and would show mercy; so, while Priam walked on the plain, Zeus faced his beloved son Hermes and spoke, saying :

“Hermes! Guide of the Blessed, it pleases you to associate with men as well. Go, then! Go bring Priam to the Achaean ships. You lead men down all pathways, including the last way forward. Use your wiles to contrive a way for Priam to reach Achilles.”

Thus Zeus. And Hermes eagerly obeyed. The runner fitted to his feet his golden ambrosial sandals, which lifted him along the waves of the sea, and over vast distances of earth, quick as the breezes of the wind. And with him he brought his wand of sorcery that lowers some eyelids to sleep, or rouses others awake. Holding the ῥάβδος indescribable in words, he came to the mouth of the mighty Hellespont, where the ships stood arrayed in a black square on the sandy shore at land’s edge.

So came to Priam the splendid, luck-bringing god, the giver of good things : a child at heart, with the extent of a child’s guile, even when deceiving—such as now. For just now,

having passed the ancient tomb of Ilos, its stone discoloured
and crumbling, Priam had halted, and the mules drank from the river.
By now darkness had come down to earth. And Idaeus leaned close
to Priam, and said :

“My king, look there. We must consider things, and act with caution.
I see a man, a young man who looks well in my eyes, handsome
and secure; there is a radiance about him that makes him
easier to see in the dark;—he may be about to kill us.”

And old man Priam watched as Hermes walked up to him, and all
the hair on his arms stood on end, and he stood up onto his
weak limbs and waited. And the god stood by him, and took his hand,
and spoke to the old man, saying :

“Why, father, are you up so late in the dark, when all people
else through the infinite night are asleep? Have you no fear
of the Achaean strength coming in on the breezes here?
You know there are monstrous enemies—strange, implacable—
hard-by here, don’t you? If a single man of them came here
and saw this pile of wealth utterly hidden in the darkness,
do you think your words, or your hopes, would help you then?
You have no youth about your body, and your friend here is older
still; so how are you to stop a man from working his will
on you, come what may? I’m to be trusted, though. You are lucky
you met me. Not only will I not hurt you, I will defend you
against whomever other. For you remind me of my own dear father.”

Then old man Priam answered him :

“Is it as you say, dear child? Perhaps the god holds his hand

over me now, since I meet such a traveller as yourself,
 here in this dangerous place. An auspicious sign,
 and so admirable in look and stature. And wise at heart,
 besides. Your parents much be very fortunate. Blessed ones.”

And tricky Hermes replied to him :

“Indeed you speak rightly in all things, old sir. But come, tell me,
 truly now, are you off for a foreign land, and taking all
 that is yours, in the hope of keeping yourself safe and sound there?
 Are you turning your back on sacred Troy in fear?
 For the best man there is now dead, your son.
 He never stopped fighting the Achaeans.”

And Priam answered him :

“Who are you? Which great family is yours,
 that you speak so well of my son?”

And tricky Hermes replied to him :

“You would have me answer that? That would be
 some doing. I have seen your son, δῖος Ἴκτορα ,
 with my own eyes, many times, fighting man-to-man
 in war, in war that wins men glory, many times,
 pushing the enemy back to their ships in a rage,
 splitting Argives down the middle with the sharp bronze.
 All we could do was stand and look on with wonder.
 For Achilles would not allow us to fight, on account of
 his anger for son of Atreus Agamemnon. I am one
 of his warriors, and I came here to Troy on the same ship.

I'm a Myrmidon. Polyctor, a wealthy man, and as old
 as you are, is the name of my father. He has six sons, and
 I'm the seventh. Of all my brothers, it was my luck with the
 pebbles to come here. Now here I am on the plain by the ships.
 At dawn, you should know, the Achaeans are preparing to go
 encircle the city, and make war with accustomed rapacity.
 Sitting idle has become too much work for the lot of them,
 and the leaders can no longer hold the men back from battle."

And Priam answered him :

"If it is as you say, that you are one of Achilles' men,
 come then! I ask you to tell me plainly. Is my son still by
 the ships? Or has he been cut into pieces by Achilles,
 and all the parts thrown to the dogs?"

And tricky Hermes replied to him :

"Old sir, neither dog nor bird has yet feasted on the body,
 though it lies by the black ship of Achilles, where all our tents
 have been from the first. Twelve days now your son has lain
 where he is, yet his skin shines with a freshness that startles one
 who looks on it. All the other men believe the body should
 be rotten by now. No squalid worms are able to nibble
 into his flesh, such as flourish in the dead on a battlefield.
 If you want the absolute truth, Achilles drags the body
 around in a circle, tethered to the back of his chariot,
 round and round the tomb of his dead friend, always at the first light
 of dawn. But if you see the body now, good sir, you'll see it
 fair as it ever was, and marvel. He lies as fresh as the dew
 that gathers on him in the mornings. There is no blood, there are

no wounds.—Though many bronze spears passed through his body.
In this way the gods on high protect your son (though waited till
he was dead to do this). Yet, for all that, your son pleased the gods,
when alive.”

Thus Hermes, and the old man nodded, then replied, saying :

“Child, take this cup. You see its fine workmanship, its value.
It’s yours. Protect me on the way to the tent of Achilles.”

And Hermes answered him :

“Good sir, you endeavour to test my faith, as I am a much
younger man than you, and you wish to know my character at heart.
You cannot persuade me through gifts or through any other way,
without Achilles coming to know of it. I fear the man,
and look on with wonder at the man, and would die for the man.
So I will do no little thing that might be called betrayal.
But I will bring you to the man, if that’s what you want. I will
bring you to Achilles. Do you want to stand before Achilles?”

And old man Priam nodded, and Hermes took that as a yes.

So Hermes Luck-bringer darted up, and before the old man
knew it, they had swept past what was left of the collapsed trench,
and what was left of the demolished wall, and had passed unseen
by the watchers at their look-outs, for as they were preparing
their suppers, the full number of them fell asleep when Hermes
came near. Then the god unbolted the gates, which swung open
on their hinges, and Hermes escorted the old man inside,
along with all the shining gifts in the four-wheeled wagon.

Then they came to a lofty, high-beamed tent, Achilles' tent,
that his faithful Myrmidons had built for their master, having
hewn thick trunks of cut-up fir trees into shape, and roofing it
with a spiky thatching of reeds gathered from meadowlands.

Surrounding the tent stood close-packed spikes upright in close order,
also built by his men for their master. The door had one solitary bolt,
a thick piece of pinewood, but it took the strength of three men
to move it (Achilles alone could draw it back with one hand).

Here at the tent Hermes slid the bolt aside for the old man,
and brought all the gifts from the wagon through the opened door.

Then he spoke :

“Before I go, old sir, know that I am Hermes, sent to you
by my father, to escort you to this very spot. So now
I have done this, so now I can go. But you step inside.
Wrap your arms round his knees, and beg him however you can,
beg him by his father and his mother and his child.
Perhaps you may soften his heart.”

Thus busy Hermes Luck-bringer, who darted up and away,
returning to the open space of infinite Olympus.

So Priam stood there where he was, at nightfall; then stepped forward,
leaving Idaeus behind him with the animals. He went
to the tent where he would come to find magnificent Achilles,
beloved of Zeus. Inside, he saw the man with some of his
friends; but Achilles sat apart, sitting over the remains

of his supper. Warriors Automedon and Alcimus,
meanwhile, attended to him carefully and quietly,
standing behind him at table. Unseen of any of these,
the old man stepped further inside, and looked upon the sorrow
darkening the face of Achilles, whose mighty head was bowed low.

So now the old man took another step. And then Achilles
raised his head, and saw the King of Troy standing weak before him.

Then Automedon and Alcimus took some steps forward,
but their master raised his hand; so they obeyed him, and stood still.

So the mighty king of Troy sank to his knees, and wrapped his arms
round the legs of Achilles; and he kissed the hands that had killed
his son. He kissed the terrible, man-killing hands that had taken
all of his good children.

And Achilles looked on with bewilderment ever-sinking
deeper into his eyes; and his friends turned to one another
in astonishment, but said nothing, in fear of Achilles.

The Trojan king lay low before the Achaean champion,
just as a man, whose many terrible mistakes in his homeland
leads him to flee elsewhere, and hopes for assistance from someone
of wealth, anywhere, and everyone looks on him with wonder;
just so did Achilles look down on this person with wonder.

And old man Priam was likewise amazed to be where he was,
and likewise amazed to be meeting the eyes of Achilles.

So Achilles waited for the old man to speak. Thus, Priam

now began his prayer, and said :

“Son of Peleus, godlike Achilles, think of your father.

He who cared for you is of such an age as mine.

He faces what last years he has left without his son

by his side to protect him. So his neighbours may

bully him, and he has no one to defend him

against ruin, and then death. But, in his hardship,

he rejoices at heart, when he thinks of his son,

his heroic Achilles; and hopes for the day

when the boy returns to come live with the father.

This dream of his he hopes for day by day.

And now I come here to see you. I have come far

only to lose everything I made. I tell you

all my good sons are dead. You look down on a man

ruined in all ways, with nothing left for his heart.

Fifty sons I had with me in indomitable Troy,

when the Achaeans came in their ships. Nineteen of my

sons came from the same mother's womb; the others by

the women of my Halls. Of all these sons, a great many,

insane Ἄρης has taken far the best of them, and left me

with the weak. The one last hero, who with his solitary

strength, defended his city and his people, he, too, you have

taken from the father, even Hector, famous Hector.

You, Achilles, have proven stronger than my son.

I come before you at the ships of the Achaeans to ask

for his body, and I bring an abundance of gifts of honour

for you, too valuable to price. Think of the gods,

and show mercy to me, and remember your own dear father.

I am more alone even than he; and have endured beyond

what any man should; and now I reach out my hand, in kindness,
to the man who killed my children.”

Thus spoke Priam. Achilles glared at him, and felt inside him
a longing to drop tears for his own father. And he reached out
and took the warm hand of the old man, and gently removed it
from his own. But they stayed together, each thinking of the dead,
and tears gushed down from both; the one, for magnificent Hector,
while bent upon his face before the feet of Achilles;
while the other wept for his father, and for Patroclus;
and their mingled lamentations filled the tent.

Then when all his tears were shed, δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς got to
his feet, and raised the old man up from the floor, feeling pity
for his ancient frame, the grey hair and the grey beard;
and he spoke to the king, and said :

“Ah, luckless man! You have tolerated much; and have much yet
of horror for your heart to take in. You had the grace to come
on your own through the Achaean ships and stand before me,
and look into the eyes of the one who took all your many sons.
How is this possible? Your heart is as stone. But come now! Sit.
You and I together will let our disasters lie quiet
in our heart. Somehow we will sit quiet through all the sorrows.
For what good is there in endless grief? This is how it is for us,
all of us. We each of us have a miserable destiny given us
at birth, a destiny to live in pain in a hateful world,
which no god truly cares for, not enough to brighten it all.
Zeus writes everything into the surface of space and that’s that :
some men have blessings whether they earn it or not;
while others the lover of lightning is happy to see

luckless and maltreated wherever he wanders, and the world
leaves him crazy, and drives him on in that way, then is reviled
by both gods and men. I would not call that fair, and yet we pray.

As for my father Peleus, the gods gave him all the luck
he would want, for a time. At birth he was given many gifts
that would serve him well among men. He became wealthy, and a king,
the master of the Myrmidons, and though a mortal he won
as his wife a goddess of the sea. But all that now I know
means nothing to him, as he thinks on his son destined to die
here, his only son. My father grieves far away in a land
I will never see again. For I have come here to bring you
and your children and your people a misery without end.
But when I was a young boy I heard all about distant Troy,
about grand King Priam, most blest of men, who brought together
Lesbos and Phrygia and everything in between by reason
of your wealth and your sons and your wisdom.
All men everywhere know of you and your glory; your name has
sailed down the Hellespont into places beyond our knowledge.

But the gods had ideas for you, just as they had some for me.
So we traded our good fortune for war, for slaughter of men.
What are we to do now, but hold ourselves, till there's nothing left
to hold. Endless tears in our heart won't bring back what we have lost.
And, if you don't mind me saying so, we'll all be dead in Hades soon."

Then old man Priam replied to him, saying :

"Achilles, beloved of Zeus, for all those reasons you say,
I cannot accept your invitation and sit. No, not while
my son lies unburied. Please now, return my son to me,

so that I may see him one last time. All the riches I brought with me are yours to keep, treasures beyond price. (Or so I used to think.) May all its wealth serve you well when you return to your homeland. They're tokens of your kindness in sparing my life, to allow me to let be in the light of the sun, at least for one more day—which is more valuable than any treasure."

Then δῖος Achilles, glaring at him from under dark brows, answered him, saying :

"Irritate me no further, old man. I give you your Hector of my own decision. As it is, all this was meant to be just as it has fallen. I am sure of it. For there's no way any man, even one young and strong, would dare enter into an enemy camp alone and unarmed. Somehow you escaped the notice of the watchers. Somehow you drew back the bolts of our doors. It is clear that some god led you to me. Now say no more, old man, unless you wish to move my heart to raise my hand and kill you where you stand, regardless of the gods and any of their Words."

Thus Achilles; and the old man, pale with fear, obeyed his command.

Then son of Peleus Achilles sprang up quick as a lion and went out of the tent, followed close by his two attendants, Automedon and Alcimus, now his closest friends, now that Patroclus was dead. They released the mules from the yoke, and brought old man Idaeus into the tent and had him sit in a chair. Then they removed the shining ransom for Hector from the bed of the wagon. But Achilles left two richly-

embroidered robes behind, and a simple tunic, so that he might wrap the corpse, thereby making its transfer decent for all, and a gentler sight for his mother when brought back to his home. So Achilles summoned the handmaidens and requested of them to wash the body and anoint it, arranging for this work to be done out of Priam's sight, so the father might not see his son, and lose himself in anger and rage, because Achilles would have to kill him if this happened. So the handmaidens bathed the body and rubbed in oil, then draped it in a fine cloak and tunic. Achilles then lifted it up, and lowered it down onto the bier. Then, he and his two attendants carried the body out to the four-wheeled wagon, and set it inside.

Afterwards, Achilles sighed sadly, and cried out to his friend :

"I beg you, Patroclus! Show no anger if down in Hades you come to hear that Hector has been given to his father! All this has been done rightly, and in honour of your good heart."

Thus δῖος Achilles, who then turned back and re-entered his tent.

Inside, he lowered himself onto his chair, a beautifully-carven piece, ornamented with imagery of myths of his homeland, a past and a place he had no chance to ever return to. This chair was set across the space from Priam's, and with all that distance between them, Achilles began to speak to the king, saying :

"Your son is now set free, as you wished. He lies upon a bier, and when Dawn comes you will see him in the light, and take him home. But for the moment we should consider some supper for you.

Think of Niobe of the infinite tears. Even she kept herself alive with food, even after all that she suffered. Her twelve children made her believe herself the most fortunate of mothers. Not her husband's arts, not his or her own magnificent families, not the kingship they held : none of this gave her pleasure at heart the way her children gave her pleasure. Then, one day, graceful Niobe in her woven robe of golden thread stood before the people, and proclaimed the precedence of her children over all others, even those of goddess Leto, which would mean Apollo and Artemis. So the gods killed them all. Apollo, in his anger, aimed his silver bow, and took down the six brothers in their Halls. Then, arrow-shooting Artemis destroyed the six daughters, each in the eyes of the others, as her arrow-points came in and ripped through their flesh, there in their beloved house, beside their beloved brothers. Niobe had begged the gods for her youngest girl to be spared, but even as she prayed, her youngest child died in her arms. And so the gods took all the children of Niobe away. For nine days they lay in the shambles of blood over the floor and walls, for Zeus had turned the people of the city to stone. I suppose the story means that we should stop thinking so much of ourselves. As any rate, on the tenth day the gods above us buried them; and Niobe thought for the first in all that time of food, for all her tears had wearied her down past endurance. Even she took in food, although she had thought herself past taking in anything more. Nowadays, they say, she, too, has turned to stone, and sits atop Sipylus, where she broods endlessly on her cares. No blood runs through her veins; and her tongue does not move in her mouth; but from the peak of the mountain her tears flow as a fountain spring down and forever. Thus, good king, think on food for yourself; then afterwards you may bring your son back within your city walls,

and mourn him with all the tears a desolate heart can produce.”

So δῖος Achilles rose, took hold of a silver-white ram,
and cut its throat, as a sacrifice so that men might live on.
His companions flayed it, then prepared the meat excellently,
slicing it, and spitting the pieces, and roasting them well.
Then they drew off all the flesh and put it onto a platter.
Automedon then filled beautiful woven baskets with bread
and placed them on the table, while Achilles served the meat.
So they reached out their hands to the goodness set before them.
Then when they had eaten, they sat in a momentary peace,
and Priam, king of Troy, looked on with wonder at Achilles,
admiring the sort of man he was : handsome in aspect
and poise, and wondrous with words. So, when each was satisfied
with his contemplation of the other, then the old man
begin to speak, Priam, the godlike king of Troy, and he said :

“I shall lay myself down now, if that is acceptable to you,
master Achilles, faithful friend of God. Is there a bed here
for me to rest on?—so that in sleep I may release myself
of all my troubles for awhile? That is sleep’s sweetest gift.
For I have not closed my eyes since your hands took my son from me.
Ever since, I have sat in my courtyard in mourning, in the dust,
thinking on my many sorrows. And now I have tasted bread
and meat for the first time as well; for in all that time I sat
careless of my own life and death, and let nothing pass my throat.”

Thus Priam, and mighty Achilles nodded. He requested
of his friends and handmaidens to prepare two beds
within the tent, and to furnish them with soft purple blankets,
and to spread coverlets over them, and on those a layer

of cloaks of thick, fleecy wool, to keep old Priam warm at night.
 So straightaway the handmaidens left with flaming torches in
 their hands, to get on with their domestic work in quiet haste.

Then Achilles addressed the old king with a smile, saying :

“Good Priam, you should know that on any ordinary night
 one or another of the Achaean leaders or ministers
 are wont to come to me to talk strategy and devise plans
 against your city. If now one came out of the dark and saw
 you here in my tent, it wouldn’t take long for Agamemnon
 to find out, and my own life might end even faster than that.
 As for you, I wouldn’t have any better expectations.
 But let us see if we can get to the coming of the dawn.
 If we pull this off, please tell me now, and be straight about it :
 How many days do you have in mind before you bury your son?
 Because for all that time I’ll do my best to hold the army back.”

And Priam answered Achilles :

“Friend, if you are willing to do this for me as you promise,
 and allow my good Hector his rightful burial, if you,
 mighty Achilles, indeed grant me this wondrous kindness,
 then please obey these words. You know my people have shut themselves
 inside the city, where resources are scarce now. The forests
 are far, and though my Trojans are terribly afraid to show
 themselves just now, we will travel to the mountains, and carry
 back the wood we need. For nine days we shall weep in the palace,
 and wait. And on the tenth day we shall honour my son with burial,
 and the people shall assemble and feast. Then, on the eleventh
 day, we will raise his tomb. And on the twelfth we fight, if we must.”

And Achilles answered Priam :

“Great king, it will be as you say. I will hold the army back
for all the time that you have specified to me.”

And so the two men clasped each other’s hands,
right on right, a pledge for Priam to feel no fear.
Then they laid themselves down to sleep, Priam
and his attendant Idaeus, and their wise hearts
beat through the silence of the night. But Achilles
stayed awake a while longer, lying in bed
with a very beautiful woman at his side, Briseïs.

Now, under the stars, the people of earth slept all the night through,
and even some gods, too, but not tricky Hermes Luck-bringer.
The wily slayer of hundred-eyed Argus was wide awake,
contemplating how to get old Priam away from the ships,
past the sharp-eyed gate-keepers, and back safely to his city.

So Hermes came up close to the king and whispered in his ear :

“Good sir, why are you sleeping so peacefully among enemies?
Achilles has spared your life, but too many dreadful ones won’t.
You came across the plain for your son, and have set Hector free :
but what if Troy is obligated to gather a ransom
for you, if you’re found where you lie, and Agamemnon is told
of this? The price to be paid for Hector’s funeral will rise
to an unimaginable value, if you’re taken captive here.”

Thus Hermes. Suddenly Priam awoke and got to his feet,

and stirred his attendant, Idaeus. The tent of Achilles was dark and quiet, and the two old men made their way outside, where their four-wheeled wagon stood ready, with their mules yoked, and the body of Hector, enrobed on his bier, in the back.

So Hermes watched over them as they drove through the starry night, following the paths of the broad Argive camp, yet no one saw them go.

Dawn, then, lifted her veil, and revealed all of her beauty to the people of the earth. By this time the two men had come to the crossing of the fast-flowing river, the whirling Xanthus. There, splendid Hermes left them to care for themselves, while he stepped up to the open space of high Olympus.

So the two men crossed the river, and continued down the plain, with Idaeus driving the mules, and old man Priam walking beside the wagon, and the lifeless body of his son in the back.

As they neared the lofty city of Troy, neither man nor woman noticed the approach of their king. Only one of all the Trojans saw—Cassandra, daughter of Priam, and as beautiful as golden Aphrodite. Hearing her god-given intuition, Cassandra had rushed up the high tower by the Scaean gate, and looked out onto the wide plain, and saw her father. She saw him walking beside Idaeus driving the four-wheeled wagon. And then she saw her brother's dead body lying in the back. At that she shrieked in the night, and all the city heard her cry :

"He comes! Hector comes home from the battlefield! Troy! Come see your hero return to your city!—the great glory of all you men and women when he was alive, and fighting

for you!”

Thus Cassandra. Then no man nor woman was left within the city,
for all the people came streaming forth through the opening gates.
All the Trojans fell weeping when they saw Priam returning
with his dead son, their hero, the incomparable Hector.

Hector’s wife Andromache cried out, and took hold of the body,
and would not let go; while his noble mother tore at her hair
and garments in a mania of woe; and all the people
crowded round the rolling wagon, and walked along beside it,
dropping tears all the while. So all day long until the sun
went down the people of Troy would have mourned their fallen hero,
weeping beside the gates of the city, had not King Priam
spoken out for all of his people to hear him :

“Make a way, good people, for a hero to pass through into
our city. When I have brought him home where he belongs,
back in Troy, then you may weep your every last tear.”

And so, at the word of their king, the people spread out, making
a way for the mule-wagon to move forward.

Then, when δῖος Hector was brought to the glittering palace,
he was laid on a curtained bed. And the poet-singers came
to lead the threnody, and all the women joined in lamentation.
And among them was precious Andromache, low-sunk in tears,
holding her powerful husband in her arms all the while.

She said :

“My husband, they have taken you from me, so young. You have left
 me a widow in your halls. You have left your son, just an infant.
 You and I brought him into a world of everlasting woe.
 Terrible to say it, but I don’t think he’ll come to manhood,
 for the city will fall to dust long before that. You are gone.
 You have left us, you who watched over the women and children
 and kept us safe. I fear all these I speak of will soon be sailing
 the black ships, to be brought who knows where; and I and your child
 shall be slaves to a hateful master, and forced to labour at
 disgraceful things. Or some Achaean, angry at you for all
 your killing, will lift up your baby and throw him from the wall,
 a miserable death. Ah, child, your father was never gentle
 with the Achaeans! Now they want their vengeance, and the weak
 will have to pay. Hear all the sorrow that fills the city air;
 nothing awaits any of us now but pain and misery.
 Your parents suffer as I suffer, as your one son suffers.

If you had died in this bed, you might have reached out with your hand
 and held my own, and given me words to remember for life,
 to think on night and day, with tears; or you might have simply said,
 ‘I love you’, one last time.”

Thus unhappy Andromache. Then the mother of Hector,
 noble Queen Hecuba, took the lead in the lament, saying :

“Hector, most beloved of all of my children, my spirit,
 my very soul, ah, no! Let it not be so! The gods favoured
 you while you lived, and they watched over you and all that’s yours,
 and yet they still took you in your prime. But that wasn’t enough
 for the gods. That crazed murderer kidnapped many of our sons
 and sold them across the sea in foreign places, to Samos

and Imbros and Lemnos. That wasn't enough for him, either.
 No evil is ever enough for the worst people on earth.
 After he robbed you of life with the horrible bronze, he had
 to rob you of your dignity, too : insulting your body,
 dragging it round the grave of his friend Patroclus—
 though all that effort will not give him one more moment of life.
 And how strange it is to look on you now, my son. You lie here
 as if freshly gone away, still full of colour, as if taken
 painlessly, by one of the gentle arrows of Apollo.
 If only you might open your eyes, and see your mother here.”

Thus Hecuba in lamentation, and all the women wept.

Then, third to lead the lament, was Helen, saying :

“Great Hector, kindest of all Trojan men! Dearest to my heart
 of all my husband's brothers! Twenty years ago your brother
 Alexandros led me from my homeland and took me as wife,
 and I left behind me a family of my own, which brings me
 many scornful words from the people of this city. If I
 had only sunk to the bottom of the sea before my foot
 touched Troy! Then everyone here would know happiness.
 As it is, the city has lost its gentlest soul. I never
 heard a word of unkindness from you, not a word of distaste;
 if such came from others in the palace, who also wish me dead,
 you'd turn to them and say, 'Be gentle, be kind-hearted, be good.'
 (Noble Priam alone is as gentle with me as you were with me.)
 And so with these same tears I mourn for you and mourn for myself,
 for I have lost a great friend and ally. No one else in Troy
 looks at me without a shudder, and needless words of cruelty.”

Thus spoke Helen in lamentation, and all the women mourned.

King Priam, meantime, stood before the men and spoke :

“All good Trojans, hear me! Bring firewood into the city.

And none of you men shall dread the Achaeans along the way,
for Achilles gave me his word, when I came from the black ships :
They will do us no harm until the twelfth coming of the dawn.”

So the men of Troy yoked the oxen and the mules to the carts,
and gathered themselves together, and went forth from the city.
For the space of nine days they hauled in a vast supply of firewood;
but when the tenth Dawn came with light to bless the peoples of earth,
then they lifted Hector up to the summit of the pyre,
weeping all the while; then they flung onto him the fire.

Then, at the time when Dawn came to spread her rosy fingers wide,
and light fell gently to earth, the people came from the city
and stood round the pyre of fearless, stout-hearted Hector.
First they quenched the fire, pouring the red wine over the flames
that were left. Then his brothers and his friends collected the bones,
and all the while tears trickled down their faces, yet they neglected
to wipe them away. They laid the remains in a golden urn,
wrapped up in soft, sea-purple robes, then lowered the memory
of the man into an open grave, and covered it over
with heavy, well-ordered stones, and raised the tomb of their hero.
During this the Trojans stationed watchmen all around, in case
any bronze-armoured Argives came skulking over to ruin things.
Then when the tomb was complete, they went back into the city
and shut the gates, and bolted them tight; then gathered together
in the palace of the king, where Priam hosted a glorious

feast for his fallen son, while Zeus Father watched from above.

Thus was the funeral for Hector, hero of long ago.

The End

of

The Iliad of Homer

22 January 2022 – 29 October 2022